



Susan Combs Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts



September 25, 2008

### Ladies and Gentlemen:

Every corner of Texas is blessed with beautiful state parks, and many of us have wonderful memories of spending time in these natural areas with our families and friends. The benefits of state parks are well-known: they preserve unspoiled land for the enjoyment of future generations, they offer visitors opportunities for recreation and education, they provide protection for our watersheds and endangered species, and they contribute to our state's overall public health and quality of life.

But many Texans may not realize that parks benefit our state and local economies as well. With this report, we hope to highlight the economic benefits of state parks. We visited numerous state parks around the state, talked with local economic development and tourism officials, studied retail sales and other data, and pored over recent economic analyses. We are pleased to share our findings, which demonstrate the favorable impact that the state parks have on the Texas economy and the positive returns the state receives on its financial investments to operate, maintain and preserve these crown jewels of Texas.

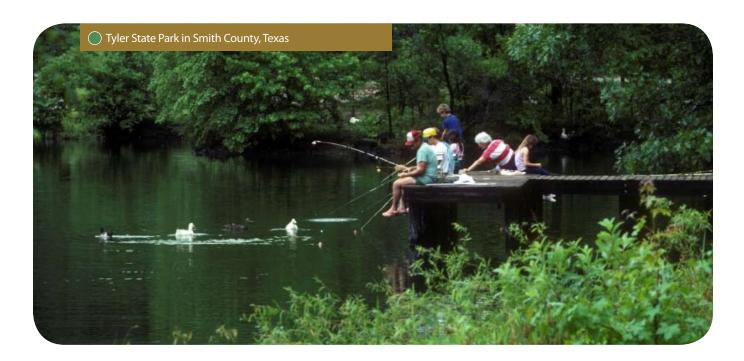
For example, we found that state parks generated almost \$3 million in retail sales and \$1.5 million in resident income, on average, in counties with state parks. Parks created 66 jobs, on average, in rural counties and 53 jobs in metropolitan counties. We also found that visitors to state parks from outside Texas added \$15.7 million to the gross state product, \$7.9 million in total personal income and 288 jobs.

Our parks are in dire need of additional funding to meet their most basic needs. At this critical time, it is important to understand all of the benefits that state parks provide to the state, including the economic prosperity they bring to local communities. I hope you will find this report helpful.

Sincerely,

Susan Combs

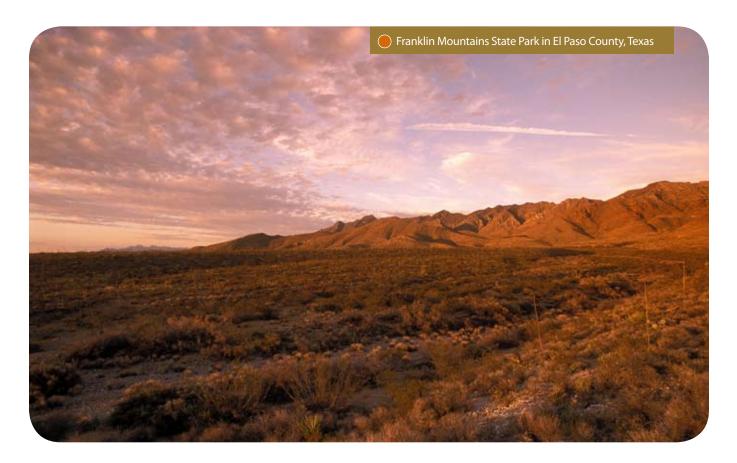




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On the Cover: Franklin Mountains State Park



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks have a significant economic impact on communities in Texas.

Counties with state parks, particularly rural counties, benefit from the direct spending of out-of-county visitors, which in turn increases both county residents' personal income and the number of local jobs.

 Non-local park visitors—visitors from a county other than the one in which a park is located—and park employees spend an average of \$2.1 million annually in counties with parks. In each county with a park, on average, this amount generates almost \$3 million in retail sales and \$1.5 million in resident income each year. These expenditures also generate an average of 59 new jobs in each county with a state park.

- Rural state parks contribute significantly to the counties in which they are located. In the average rural county that hosts a state park, approximately 90 jobs out of every 10,000 are attributable to park-related expenditures.
- Rural counties with a state park have taxable retail sales 15 percent higher per capita than rural counties without a state park.

The state realizes gains to the gross state product, personal income and total employment from visitors to state parks who come from outside the

### - Executive Summary -

state. State parks in urban areas also provide an economic benefit by mitigating some potential environmental costs.

- Out-of-state visitors to Texas parks contribute \$15.7 million in gross state product, \$7.9 million in personal income and 288 new jobs to the Texas economy each year.
- Urban state parks' role in mitigating environmental impacts such as pollution and storm water run-off is estimated to contribute 3,906 jobs, \$233.6 million in gross state product and \$153.7 million in personal income to the state's economy each year.



In addition, parks and the recreational opportunities they provide are important in recruiting and retaining knowledge-sector workers who are highly sought by employers in many Texas cities.

Anecdotal evidence, too, points to the positive economic impact of state parks. Comptroller staff visited numerous park facilities around the state, conducting interviews with park superintendents and staff, private citizens, parks advocates and volunteers, as well as local business owners, real estate professionals, chambers of commerce and economic development leaders. These interviews bolstered the Comptroller's finding that state parks are a significant boon to the economies of the communities in which they are located. These officials confirmed that state parks provide many positive benefits to their areas, and they uniformly asserted the importance of the state's continued financial support of these facilities.

Other benefits provided by state parks cannot be quantified but are equally valuable. These positive attributes include enhanced economic development opportunities, cultural and historical heritage, recreation, health and physical fitness, and environmental preservation and quality.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received increased funding from the 80th Legislature in 2007 (with voter approval) to maintain and repair state park facilities. While it is too early to assess the economic impact of the expenditures resulting from this funding increase, research indicates this investment is likely to have a positive return.



# OVERVIEW

Many Texans have idyllic memories of time spent with family and friends in natural settings. As the number of urban Texans increases and cities expand ever outward, our state parks — and the experiences they offer — have become increasingly important.

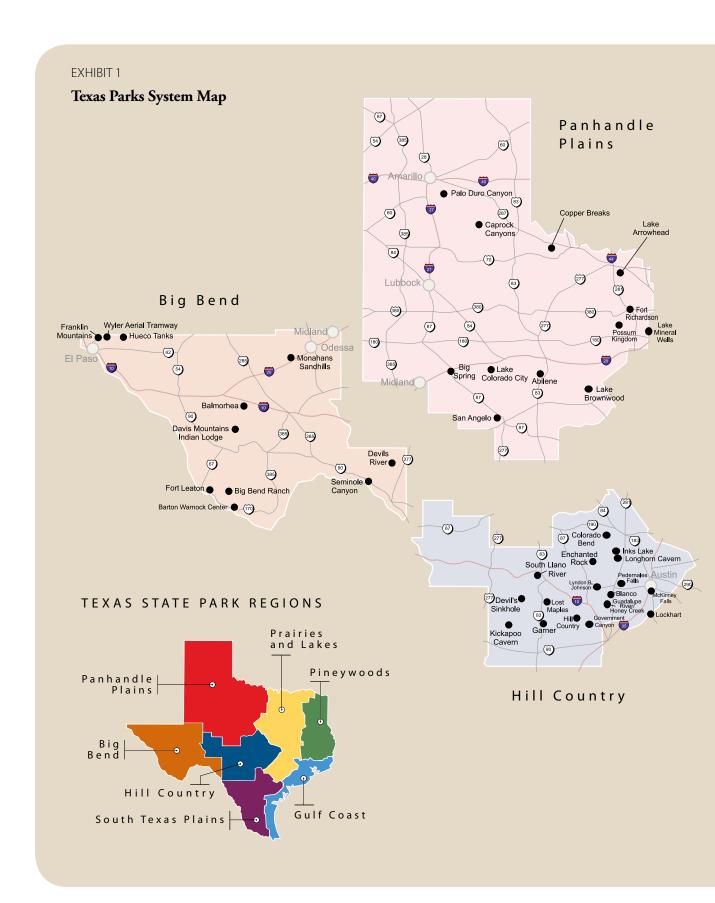
While Texans enjoy the green colors of nature, others are enjoying green of another sort — the cash earned by local businesses catering to park visitors and the economic growth it generates.

### TEXAS STATE PARK REGIONS

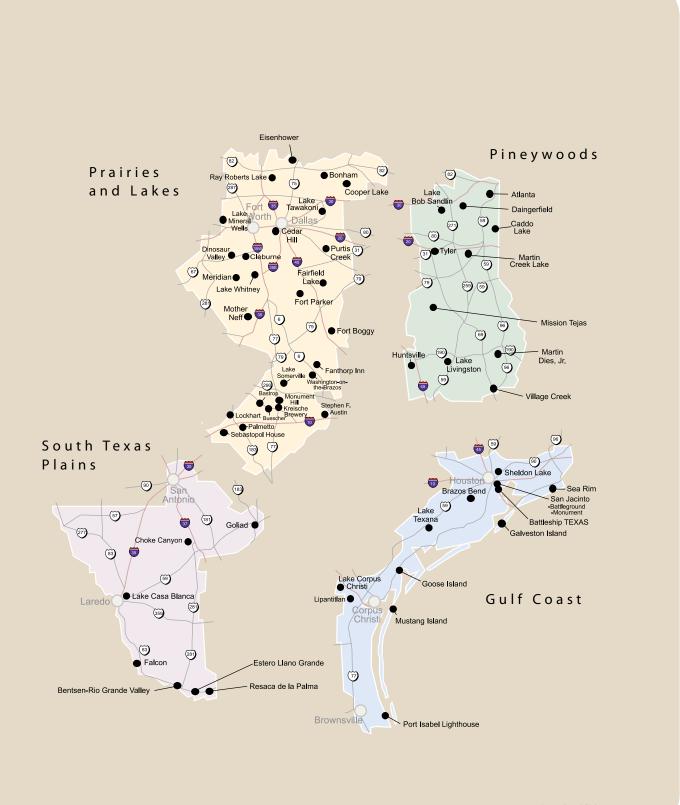


Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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### Natural Economic Assets

- Overview -

### EXHIBIT 2

### **Total Visitors to Texas Parks, 2007**

Site Name	Total Visits Fiscal Year 2007	Percent of Overnight Visitors	Acreage	County	Site Type
Cedar Hill	531,153	14.7	1,811	Dallas	State Park
San Jacinto Monument, Battle- ground and Battleship Texas	415,817	-	1,216	Harris	State Historic Site
Goose Island	371,519	16.2	321	Aransas	State Park
Mustang Island	342,256	13.5	4,094	Nueces	State Park
Garner	303,874	73.4	2,029	Uvalde	State Park
Palo Duro Canyon	301,931	15.8	26,275	Armstrong/Randall	State Park
Brazos Bend	258,378	19.5	4,975	Fort Bend	State Park
Galveston Island	243,560	43.4	2,007	Galveston	State Park
Ray Roberts Lake	235,384	37.8	5,538	Cooke/ Denton/ Grayson	State Park
Lake Casa Blanca	234,873	18	371	Webb	State Park
Bastrop	225,348	21.5	6,177	Bastrop	State Park
Dinosaur Valley	217,852	12.9	1,587	Somervell	State Park
Eisenhower	213,087	21.9	423	Grayson	State Park
Huntsville	203,087	29.2	2,083	Walker	State Park
Enchanted Rock	195,891	19.5	1,644	Gillespie	State Natural Area
Pedernales Falls	185,596	23.2	5,212	Blanco	State Park
Lake Livingston	183,569	36	636	Polk	State Park
Lake Somerville	181,832	25.2	5,520	Burleson/ Lee	State Park
Lyndon B. Johnson	161,077	0.5	718	Gillespie	State Park and Historic Site
Inks Lake	142,824	73.2	1,201	Burnet	State Park
Lake Mineral Wells and Trailway	132,245	40.7	3,282	Parker/ Palo Pinto	State Park
McKinney Falls	124,539	34.7	725	Travis	State Park
Guadalupe River - Honey Creek	117,906	40.8	4,232	Comal/ Kendall	State Park
Choke Canyon	108,471	8.6	3,786	Live Oak/ McMullen	State Park
Blanco	107,540	25.2	105	Blanco	State Park
Caprock Canyons and Trailways	105,888	10.4	15,280	Briscoe/ Floyd/ Hall	State Park
Purtis Creek	104,855	24.7	1,582	Henderson/ Van Zandt	State Park
Tyler	104,644	52.6	985	Smith	State Park
Washington-on-the-Brazos	103,973	-	293	Washington	State Historic Site
Cooper Lake	101,487	21.4	3,026	Delta/ Hopkins	State Park
Lake Arrowhead	98,998	15	524	Clay	State Park
Davis Mountains	98,101	59.8	2,709	Jeff Davis	State Park

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### Natural Economic Assets

- Overview -

EXHIBIT 2 (Continued)

### Total Visitors to Texas Parks, 2007

Site Name	Total Visits Fiscal Year 2007	Percent of Overnight Visitors	Acreage	County	Site Type
Cleburne	97,934	27	529	Johnson	State Park
Fort Parker	93,123	22.9	1,448	Limestone	State Park
Lake Corpus Christi	90,459	42.8	14,156	San Patricio	State Park
Palmetto	89,759	15.3	277	Gonzales	State Park
Lost Maples	87,804	22.6	2,174	Bandera/ Real	State Natural Area
Lake Whitney	84,694	37.9	1,315	Hill	State Park
Falcon	83,379	23.9	573	Starr	State Park
Lake Tawakoni	80,247	26.8	376	Hunt	State Park
Stephen F. Austin	76,966	43.4	487	Austin	State Park
Caddo Lake	75,583	30.3	484	Harrison	State Park
Lake Brownwood	74,195	55.1	538	Brown	State Park
Martin Creek Lake	71,911	38.2	287	Rusk	State Park
Sheldon Lake	69,096	-	2,605	Harris	State Park
Colorado Bend	67,227	21	5,328	Lampasas/ San Saba	State Park
Lake Bob Sandlin	66,427	34.8	640	Titus	State Park
Lake Texana	63,186	63.7	575	Jackson	State Park
Possum Kingdom	58,103	52.3	1,529	Palo Pinto	State Park
Daingerfield	55,734	39.4	507	Morris	State Park
Monahans Sandhills	55,321	12.6	3,840	Ward/ Winkler	State Park
South Llano River	55,212	52.5	524	Kimble	State Park
Lockhart	54,719	19.7	264	Caldwell	State Park
Seminole Canyon	54,017	17.3	2,173	Val Verde	State Park and Historic Site
Abilene	53,750	42.4	529	Taylor	State Park
Fairfield Lake	53,650	55.5	1,460	Freestone	State Park
World Birding Center - Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley	52,337	0.7	764	Hidalgo	State Park
Balmorhea	51,993	47.2	46	Reeves	State Park
Bonham	50,666	15	261	Fannin	State Park
Franklin Mountains	49,358	1.5	24,150	El Paso	State Park
Fort Richardson	48,880	35.2	477	Jack	State Park and Historic Site
Goliad	48,747	25.3	188	Goliad	State Park and Historic Site
Port Isabel Lighthouse*	48,000	-	1	Cameron	State Historic Site
Meridian	44,126	26.9	505	Bosque	State Park

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EXHIBIT 2 (Continued)

### Total Visitors to Texas Parks, 2007

	Total Visits	Percent of Overnight			
Site Name	Fiscal Year 2007	Visitors	Acreage	County	Site Type
Government Canyon	43,999	-	8,620	Bexar	State Natural Area
Lake Colorado City	42,960	35.4	500	Mitchell	State Park
Longhorn Caverns**	41,353	-	653	Burnet	State Park
Atlanta	39,940	26.3	1,475	Cass	State Park
Buescher	37,123	51.4	1,017	Bastrop	State Park
Big Spring	35,663	1.6	382	Howard	State Park
Village Creek	33,475	18.5	1,090	Hardin	State Park
Hill Country	33,160	20.9	5,370	Bandera/ Medina	State Natural Area
San Angelo	30,702	50.1	7,063	Tom Green	State Park
Martin Dies, Jr.	30,542	38.7	705	Jasper/ Tyler	State Park
Hueco Tanks	23,286	17.4	860	El Paso	State Park and Historic Site
Mother Neff	19,313	18.5	259	Coryell	State Park
Big Bend Ranch	19,131	28.5	301,319	Brewster/ Presidio	State Park
Copper Breaks	16,446	18.5	1,899	Hardeman	State Park
Mission Tejas	14,898	28.3	660	Houston	State Park
Fort Boggy	12,648	-	1,847	Leon	State Park
Monument Hill - Kreische Brewery	8,949	-	40	Fayette	State Historic Site
World Birding Center - Estero Llano Grande	7,315	-	153	Hidalgo	State Park
Fort Leaton	2,893	-	23	Presidio	State Historic Site
Sebastopol House	2,312	-	2	Guadalupe	State Historic Site
Devil's Sinkhole	1,880	-	1,860	Edwards	State Natural Area
Fanthorp Inn	1,829	-	1	Grimes	State Historic Site
Devil's River	821	-	19,989	Val Verde	State Natural Area
Kickapoo Cavern	713	-	6,368	Edwards/ Kinney	State Park
Chinati Mountains	(Not open currently)	-	37,885	Presidio	State Natural Area
Davis Hill	(Not open currently)	-	1,737	Liberty	State Park
Lipantitlan	(Not staffed - visitation not tracked)	-	5	Nueces	State Historic Site
Sea Rim	(Closed due to Hurricane Rita damage)	-	4,141	Jefferson	State Park
World Birding Center - Resaca de la Palma	(Not open currently)	-	1,200	Cameron	State Park
Total	9,065,509	25.7	586,501		

<sup>\*</sup> Park is operated by the city of Port Isabel; estimated visitor count represents October 2006 – September 2007.

\*\* Park is privately operated; visitor count represents calendar year 2007.

Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

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### **State Parks**

Texas has 93 state parks, historical sites and natural areas that contain a total of 586,501 acres in 98 counties (**Exhibits 1 and 2**). Texas has a total land area of 167.5 million acres; state parks occupy one-third of 1 percent of that total. State parks hosted 2.3 million overnight visitors and 6.7 million day visitors in 2007.

Of the 2.3 million overnight visitors, almost 72,500 or 3.1 percent were from outside of Texas. **Exhibit 3** highlights the top 15 residences of out-of-state U.S. visitors, foreign visitors and those who are unknown to Texas state parks in fiscal 2007.

Of the foreign visitors to Texas parks in 2007, 45.8 percent came from Canada, 30.4 percent from Germany, 11.8 percent from the United Kingdom and 5.5 percent from Mexico.<sup>4</sup>



### **EXHIBIT 3**

# Residences of Out-of-State Visitors to Texas State Parks, Fiscal 2007

State	Out-of-State Visitors
Louisiana	5,984
Oklahoma	4,792
New Mexico	4,740
Florida	4,158
California	3,909
Colorado	3,887
Michigan	2,732
Missouri	2,604
Minnesota	2,528
Arizona	2,467
Arkansas	2,360
Illinois	2,241
Wisconsin	1,769
Kansas	1,697
Washington	1,576
Other States	22,646
Other Countries	2,267
Unknown	141
TOTAL	72,498

Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

State parks provide inexpensive and easily accessible recreational opportunities that are increasingly valuable in an era of record-high gasoline prices. While fees vary, most park entrance fees are only a few dollars per person. Primitive campsites (those with no water or electricity) rent for about \$12 per night. Campsites with water rent for about \$15 per night, while high-end, large cabins for eight or more people cost \$200 or more per night.

The travel organization AAA found recently that more than half of its members in Texas are cutting back on driving and eating out; 9 percent were



State parks hosted 2.3 million overnight visitors and 6.7 million day visitors in 2007.

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canceling planned vacations. Members with annual household incomes of less than \$50,000 were most likely to take such actions to reduce gasoline consumption. The number of Texas park visitors will likely increase as more Texans decide to vacation closer to home.

### **Parks Funding**

Texas funds its parks system through a dedicated portion of the 6.25 percent state sales tax attributable to sales of sporting goods equipment. Until recently, the portion the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) received for the park system was capped in state law at \$32 million biennially, with the remainder going to the General Revenue Fund.

The 2007 Legislature, however, repealed that cap with House Bill 12, which allows TPWD to receive appropriations each biennium in an amount to be determined by the Legislature. The same legislation transferred 18 historical sites from TPWD to the Texas Historical Commission as of January 1, 2008. The Legislature then increased funding for all park operations in the 2008-09

biennium by \$96.4 million, a 79.7 percent increase over the previous biennium. This funding increase includes:

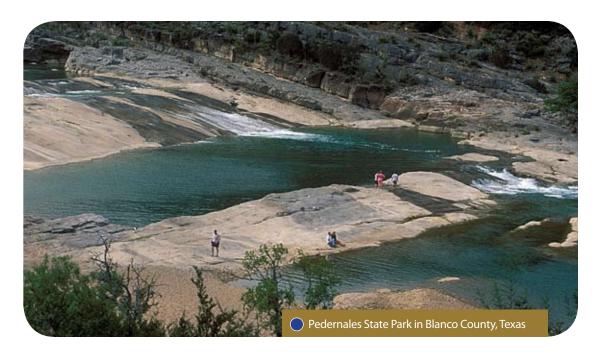
- \$43.7 million for state park operating costs and 229.3 new full-time equivalent employees (FTEs);
- \$9.4 million for new vehicles, equipment and technology for the state park system;
- \$7.0 million for state park minor repairs (projects with an average cost of \$25,000 or less); and
- \$36.3 million for additional local park grants.<sup>7</sup>

This increase in funding followed multiple news reports and public testimony concerning equipment failures, staff shortages, overcrowding and other problems at state parks across Texas.

In 2007, Texas voters approved a constitutional amendment, Proposition Four, approving the sale of state general obligation bonds in coming years to fund major infrastructure projects throughout the state. The Legislature authorized TPWD to receive a small portion—\$52.1 million—of this bond revenue. Almost half of this amount, or \$25 million, is dedicated to repairs for the battleship



The number of Texas park visitors will likely increase as more Texans decide to vacation closer to home.



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*Texas*, harbored at the San Jacinto State Historical Site near Houston. The remainder is dedicated to park repairs.<sup>8</sup>

TPWD provides local governments with grants, depending upon legislative appropriations, for the acquisition and development of local parklands. Since fiscal 2000, these grants have ranged from \$2.7 million to \$15.3 million annually. Additional funding increased the estimated fiscal 2008 funding to \$32.2 million.

In fiscal 2007, park fee revenues were \$34.6 million, according to TPWD's *Legislative Appropriations Request for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011.*9

In addition to increasing TPWD's funding, the Legislature included a Rider 30 in the department's 2008-09 budget that directed the agency to commission a business plan analyzing the necessity and impact of proposed repairs and new construction. Rider 30 required TPWD to contract with an expert to determine whether repairs would generate increased park attendance and the additional revenues needed to cover their costs.

In March 2008, TPWD released this business plan, which was prepared for the department by the team of Fisher-Heck Architects and PROS Consulting LLC. The results of the report were clear: The return on capital investment in state parks is expected to reap gains well in excess of costs.

The report found that 77 percent of the proposed capital projects would either lead to an increase in attendance at state parks or would prevent a decline in attendance. Similarly, 82 percent of the projects would increase revenues or prevent erosion in existing revenues. These findings indicate that Texas' upkeep of its parks is an important priority and that the state enjoys a significant return when it invests in its parks.

The business plan recommended that all of TP-WD's recommended capital projects be authorized



to address immediately deteriorated facilities and infrastructure at parks throughout the state. Failure to perform the recommended actions would lead to "deterioration of state assets, negative impacts on park usage, decreased financial performance of state parks, and increased costs to the State of Texas for the eventual need to perform these repairs." <sup>10</sup>

According to Kevin Good, special assistant to the director of the State Parks Division at TPWD, the investment in additional staff and repairs will improve the experience of visitors to each state park. Increased funds will allow the agency to address facilities that have needed repair for many years. In many cases, these deteriorating facilities had been the source of visitor complaints. For example, several park superintendents interviewed for this report emphasized that park visitors would comment upon the run-down state of restroom facilities at many state parks. Superintendent Todd McClanahan at Bastrop State Park suggested that a clean, functional restroom was one of the primary factors determining whether a park visitor had a positive or negative experience at his state park. Recognizing this fact, TPWD prioritized 18



The state enjoys a significant return when it invests in its parks.

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separate repair projects for restrooms at state parks in fiscal 2008 and 2009.



State parks are important public assets that provide benefits for Texas citizens.

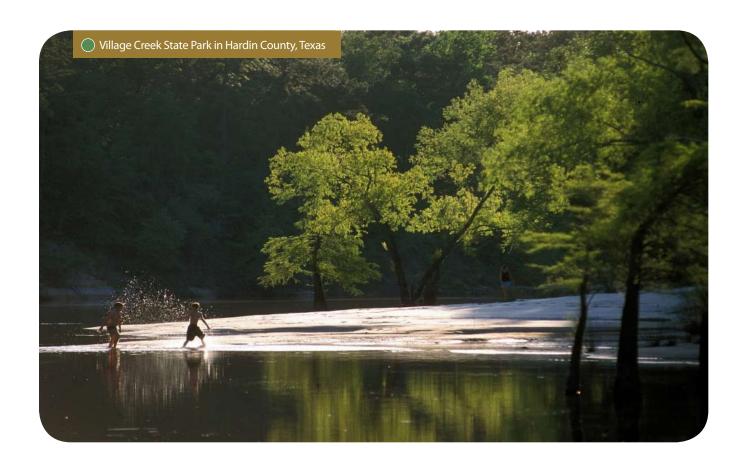
Repair projects such as these likely will have a positive impact on visitors' experiences and may contribute to increased visitation. Because many of these repair projects have only recently been completed or are currently pending, the impact of the increased funding for state parks in the current budget has not yet been assessed. Further complicating the picture, increased funding is only one of many factors that will influence state park attendance. Other factors include gas prices, economic trends, weather and publicity, some of which resulted from increased public attention to the condition of the state parks system before the 2007 legislative session.

Clearly, state parks are important public assets that provide benefits for Texas citizens, just as do schools, universities and highways. Without maintenance and investment, these assets are diminished. Investment in state parks ensures that these resources remain available for enjoyment by future generations of Texans.

### **Endnotes**

- The actual number of parks may be counted several ways. A few parks have separate parcels of land, which Texas Parks and Wildlife Department staff refers to as units. Thus, one park may constitute two or more units. There are 123 units in all. Of the 93 parks, the department leases 17 from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, cities, counties or other entities. It also leases out two parks one to a private entity and one to a city.
- Elizabeth Cruce Alvarez, ed., *Texas Almanac 2006-2007, Sesquicentennial Edition* (Dallas: *Dallas Morning News*: 2006), p. 69. The *Almanac* reference is to the state's total land area in square miles; Comptroller calculations converted that to acres. The percentage of parkland is based on these data and those supplied by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, June 2, 2008.
- Data provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "State Park Sites, Acreage, Visits," with Texas Comptroller's office calculations. Visitor counts for Longhorn Caverns, which is privately operated, and the Lighthouse at Port Isabel, which is operated by the city of Port Isabel, were obtained from staff at each facility on June 30, 2008.
- Data provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "FY07 Out of State Visitation Stats," with Texas Comptroller's office calculations.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "Lodging & Other Indoor Overnight Facilities," http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/parkinfo/facilities/lodging/. (Last visited August 19, 2008.)
- AAA Texas, "AAA Texas Member Survey Reveals Habit Changes As Result of Record Gas Prices," Irving, Texas, May 29, 2008. (Press release.)
- Texas Legislative Budget Board, Fiscal Size-Up 2008-09 Biennium (Austin, Texas, March 2008), p. 358, http:// www.lbb.state.tx.us/Fiscal\_Size-up/Fiscal%20Sizeup%202008-09.pdf. (Last visited August 28, 2008.)
- Texas S.J.R. 65 and Texas S.B. 2033, 80th Leg., Reg. Sess. (2007). For more detailed information, see Texas House Research Organization, Constitutional Amendments Proposed for November 2007 Ballot, Prop. 4: General obligation bonds for state agency construction and repair projects (Austin, Texas, August 24, 2007), p. 14, http://www.hro.house.state.tx.us/frame4. htm#const. (Last visited July 23, 2008.)
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Legislative Appropriations Request for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011 (Austin, Texas, August 20, 2008), p. 6.E. Page 4 of 17, http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd\_bk\_a0900\_0648\_08\_08.pdf. (Last visited September 22, 2008.) See subaccount 3461, "State Parks Fees," for the actual collections in fiscal year 2007.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Business Plan Update, Assessment of Capital Projects Rider 30 (A), by Pros Consulting, LLC (Austin, Texas, March 2008), pp. 2-4, http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/nonpwdpubs/media/tpwd\_rider\_30a\_final\_report. pdf. (Last visited July 24, 2008.) (Consultant's report.)

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# THE VALUE OF STATE PARKS

The economic impact of state parks is wide-ranging. The communities that host state parks benefit directly from salaries paid to park employees and from the spending of tourists who visit the area. Restaurants, retail, hospitality and other businesses benefit from the presence of nearby parks. Additional benefits come from the positive effect that parks and open spaces tend to have on

the value of nearby land. And parks provide the state with revenue from visitor fees, and local governments with increased sales and property tax revenue stemming from parks-related economic activity.

To quantify some of the economic impacts of Texas' state parks, Comptroller staff evaluated existing studies and conducted additional research.

The resulting analysis consists of three parts. First, we consider the economic impact of state parks at the local (county) level, including visitor expenditures and staff salaries. Second, we consider

### - The Value of State Parks -

### **LBJ State Park**

The beauty of the Texas Hill Country beckons visitors to the historic LBJ State Park near Stonewall. The park attracted 161,077 visitors in 2007. In 2006, the park added \$33,101,011 to Gillespie County's sales, \$17,165,483 to its residents' income, \$165,505 to the county's sales tax revenues and 719.7 jobs.

"Our [Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce] website gets 720,000 hits per year; about 125,000 of those are attributable to tourism activities in Gillespie County. The fourth most-searched term is 'outdoor' and the tenth mostsearched term is 'parks'. From that, we estimate that the parks and other county tourism activities account for 15 percent of our tourism income."

Mike Weberpal, president Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce July 30, 2008

"Companies are becoming more interested in quality of life and outdoor recreation for their employees and parks are part of the total package."

"We get 1.3 to 1.5 million visitors to Fredericksburg per year. The city has 982 hotel rooms and 330 bed and breakfast sites. Retail spending is about \$97 million and we receive \$24.5 million in lodging receipts."

Greg Snelgrove, executive director, Gillespie County Economic Development Commission
June 12, 2008

the statewide economic impact of state parks. Because much of the county-level economic impact of state parks consists of expenditures made by other Texans and the expenditure of state revenue through park budgets, this activity cannot be considered a net economic gain for the entire state. To estimate the net economic gain, we estimate the direct economic impact of out-of-state visitors to Texas state parks and the indirect economic impact resulting from environmental remediation at metropolitan state parks. Finally, we explore the other benefits of state parks, including those related to

economic development, environmental conservation, public recreation, and cultural and historic preservation.



Economists have studied the impact of public parks on urban and rural prosperity for decades. In one of the most significant early articles on the subject, geographers Robert Harper, Theodore Schmudde and Frank Thomas analyzed demographic shifts taking place in the U.S. in the decades following World War II. They noted that the increasing urbanization of postwar America presented two related problems: "how to cope with the needs of people jammed into ever-growing metropolitan centers and how to redress the declining economic opportunity in major segments of rural America."<sup>2</sup>

As a solution to these challenges, the authors proposed that recreation-based economic development could serve as a means for addressing these issues:

Urbanization with its attendant growth in leisure time and disposable income is increasing the demand for outdoor recreation



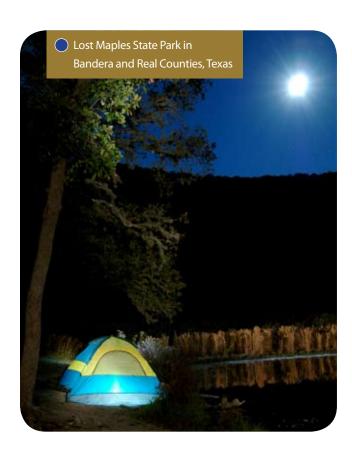
beyond the ability of urban areas to provide for the needs. Thus, the urban dweller returns to the rural area as tourist, fisherman, hunter and traveler for the day, overnight, and for the longer vacation.... Recreational demand by urbanites offers a major, if not the major, economic opportunity for revitalization of certain rural areas of the country.<sup>3</sup>

Two recent studies conducted by John Crompton and other researchers from Texas A&M University examined the economic contributions of Texas state parks to the state and counties in which they are located.

The Texas Coalition for Conservation, a nonprofit advocacy organization, commissioned these studies in 2005 and 2006. The latest report, released in December 2006, estimated the local economic impact of 79 state parks. This updated a January 2005 report by the same researchers that estimated the economic impact of 80 parks. (Sea Rim State Park in Jefferson County could not be studied in 2006 because it closed due to damage from Hurricane Rita in September 2005.) The

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results then were extrapolated to all 123 state park units. (A park unit is a contiguous area of a park or natural area. Some parks, such as Choke Canyon State Park, have multiple units separated by non-park tracts or large bodies of water.)

Crompton, an expert in tourism science, conducted these studies with the aid of Texas A&M researchers and graduate students. The team surveyed 12,878 visitors to 74 state parks in the summer and fall of 2002, 2004 and 2006. Staff from the Comptroller's office reviewed these studies and performed additional analysis, finding that state parks have significant economic benefits for the counties in which they are located.

Visitors were asked to estimate their parties' expenditures for groceries, food and beverages, recreational equipment, retail shopping, lodging, gasoline and other expenses. Only visitors from outside the county and those for whom the park was their primary destination were surveyed

(which excluded, for example, relatives visiting an area who stayed at a park in lieu of a local hotel).

In addition to direct economic impacts, the study calculated the magnitude of local economic activity, or the total value that recreational purchases added to the area economy.

The Texas A&M studies defined county economic impacts as the effect of direct annual expenditures by park budgets and non-local (defined as out-of-county) park visitors. These effects were measured in terms of park operating costs, including salaries and wages paid to park employees (counted as full-time equivalent employees, or FTEs), as well as other impacts attributable to non-local park visitors, including total county sales transactions, total county personal income and the total number of jobs created in the county.

To estimate the average economic impact on host counties, Comptroller staff examined data from the 2006 Texas A&M study, separating the average impacts based on the source of expenditure. This analysis included direct expenditures generated by non-local visitors and park budget expenditures from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). All financial data were adjusted to reflect 2008 dollars.

Based on this data, non-local county visitors and park employees spent an average of more than \$2.1 million annually in the more than 80 Texas counties with parks. This amount, in turn, generated close to \$3 million in retail sales in each county with a park and \$1.5 million in total resident income each year. These expenditures also generated an average of about 59 jobs in each county with a state park.

### **Balmorhea State Park**

Scuba divers are attracted to Balmorhea State Park's unique, 1.75-acre springfed pool in the heart of West Texas. Balmorhea attracted 52,000 visitors in 2007 with revenues of \$657,837 and a net gain of \$214,102 to the parks system. In 2006, the park contributed \$961,316 in sales and \$522,195 in personal income to Reeves County. It also was responsible for 19.5 jobs and \$4,806 in local sales taxes.

"My business would not exist without Balmorhea State Park, which is the main economic catalyst for the local economy. Many other area businesses would be unable to survive without the park."

Neta Rhyne, owner of the Toyahvale Desert Oasis Dive Shop, Toyahvale

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# Davis Mountains State Park and Indian Lodge State Park

Amid the mile-high Davis Mountains in West Texas, the park offers incredible scenic vistas, outdoor camping, challenging hiking trails and some of the darkest night skies in the country, perfect for viewing the cosmos. Nearby Indian Lodge offers newly refurbished historic pueblo cabins with handmade cedar furniture for those less inclined to sleep outside. In 2006, income from the parks combined to provide Jeff Davis County residents with 153.4 jobs, \$5,864,892 in county sales, \$2,344,813 in personal income and \$29,324 in county sales tax revenue.

"Our community could not survive without the state park. The state park and the tourism it brings helps keep area folks employed. This economic benefit allows local residents to remain in the area by earning income from the park."

Lisa Nugent, executive director, Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce These data indicate that counties that host state parks realize important economic benefits. **Exhibit 4** shows the average economic impact of a state park on its host county. **Exhibit 5** shows the change in host county employment due to park-related expenditures.

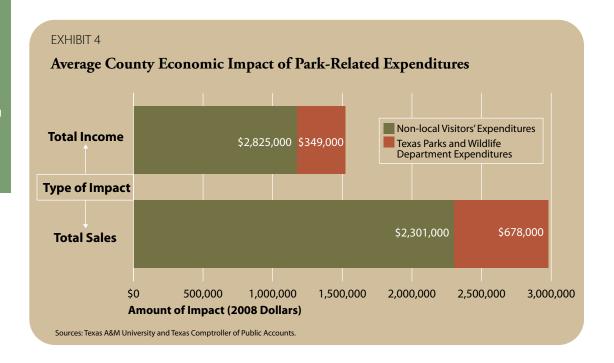
It is also useful to examine the difference in impacts on metropolitan and rural counties. Using data from the Texas A&M study and converting the expenditures to 2008 dollars, average annual direct expenditures in *rural* park-hosting counties are approximately \$2.1 million. Average annual direct expenditures in *metropolitan* park-hosting counties are roughly \$1.9 million. These expenditures, in turn, resulted in the estimated economic impacts presented in **Exhibits 6** and 7.

These data indicate that, in absolute terms, the economic impact of state parks on rural park and metropolitan host counties is roughly equivalent. The higher direct expenditures in rural counties generate slightly higher sales and slightly lower total income than in metropolitan counties.

The most prominent difference between the two types of counties is in the area of employment. Direct expenditures by non-local visitors and park employees in rural park-hosting counties generate roughly 66 jobs in the average rural county, 13 more than in the average metropolitan county. One possible reason for this higher employment level is the fact that the same dollars can support more jobs in rural areas, where the cost of living is lower.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, the most significant finding is that, while the total sales and income generated by state parks in rural and metropolitan counties are roughly the same in real terms, the smaller size of rural economies means that state parks provide a larger proportion of total county economic activity.

For example, the 53.3 jobs created by a state park in the average metropolitan park-hosting county represents only 0.04 percent of employment in the average metropolitan county, or four out of every 10,000 jobs. <sup>8</sup> By contrast, for every 10,000 jobs in the average park-hosting rural county, about 90 jobs can be credited to park-related expenditures.

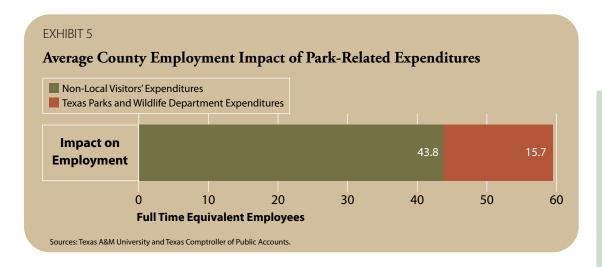


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Thus it is clear that park-related expenditures have a far greater impact on rural host counties.

### State Parks and County Sales Tax Revenue

Additional analysis by the Comptroller's office finds that state parks contribute to enhanced economic activity in rural counties. The Comptroller team analyzed county-level data on fiscal 2006 taxable retail sales in non-metropolitan counties then converted it to 2008 dollars. Per capita taxable retail sales in rural counties with state parks were 14.8 percent higher than those in rural

counties without state parks (**Exhibit 8**). Because urban counties have much larger economies with greater retail sales activity, no statistically significant relationship between parks and urban retail sales tax revenue was found.

These data indicate that state parks contribute to retail economic activity in rural host counties. One explanation for this finding could be that visitors to state parks make purchases in the host county. Such purchases would generate jobs, income and tax revenue in the counties and cities near state parks.



### Bastrop and Buescher State Parks

Visitors to the twin state parks of Bastrop and Buescher in the "lost pines" of Bastrop County can camp outdoors or stay in rustic and historic cabins built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s while enjoying bike trails, golf, swimming and fishing. Bastrop and Buescher combined attracted almost 263,000 visitors in 2007. more than three times the county's 2006 estimated population. In 2006, the Bastrop park added \$2,535,205 to county sales and \$1,092,341 in Bastrop County citizen's personal income. It was also responsible for 74.8 jobs and \$12,676 in local sales taxes. **Data for Buescher State** Park were not available.

"The parks are tremendous assets that benefit the community. Bastrop would be less of a destination without the state parks."

Susan Weems Wendel, Bastrop Chamber of Commerce June 11, 2008

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### Hueco Tanks and Franklin Mountains State Parks

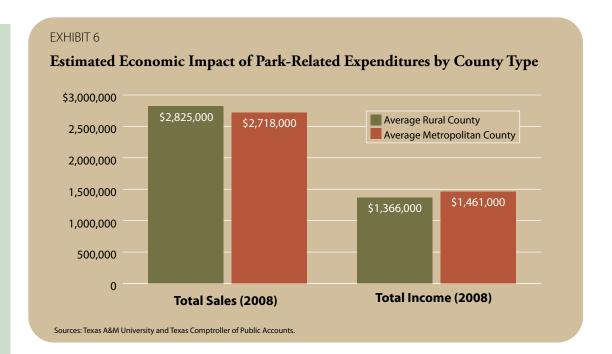
Now known as a worldclass rock climbing destination, Hueco Tanks were formed by the rainwater that created natural rock basins and have been a life-saving destination for thirsty travelers for millennia. Ancient peoples noted their presence by drawing pictographs on the rocks' walls. Franklin Mountains State Park in the city of El Paso is the largest urban park in the nation at just under 25,000 acres. Combined, the parks brought 72,644 visitors to El Paso County in 2007. In 2006, Hueco Tanks alone added 9.4 jobs, \$582,207 in county sales, \$331,774 in county residents' personal income and generated \$2,911 in county sales tax revenue. Data were not available for Franklin Mountains.

"Hueco Tanks and the Franklin Mountains attract people from all over the world."

John Cook, Mayor, El Paso July 24, 2008

"[The park] contributes to the quality of life of the surrounding area"

Richard Dayoub, president and chief executive officer, El Paso Chamber of Commerce July 24, 2008



### **State Economic Impacts**

Much of the economic activity noted above is associated with Texans visiting Texas state parks. This activity, however, may not represent a net increase in state economic output, since it represents a shift in economic activity from one part of the state to another.

But state parks also generate net economic activity in Texas. To assess this aggregate impact, Comptroller staff analyzed two factors: the direct economic impact associated with expenditures from out-of-state park visitors and the indirect impacts related to the environmental benefits that parks provide.

### Economic Impact of Out-of-State Visitors

Spending by out-of-state visitors to Texas state parks results in a contribution of \$15.7 million to the gross state product. This estimate is obtained by using the data on the number of overnight visitors from outside Texas cited in the overview of this report, as well as the average expenditures by non-local visitors to state parks estimated in the Texas A&M study. This is a conservative estimate

because the out-of-state visitor count from TPWD includes only visitors who stayed overnight in state parks and the number of day visitors must be estimated.

# Estimated Employment Impact of Park-Related Expenditures by County Type 80 Average Rural County Average Metropolitan County 70 60 66.2 50 53.3 40 30 20

**Full-Time Equivalent Employees** 

Sources: Texas A&M University and Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

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Based on TPWD's information, 3.1 percent of all overnight visitors to Texas state parks in fiscal 2007—about 72,500—were from out-of-state and stayed an average of 2.4 nights. Assuming conservatively that 3.1 percent of all 6.7 million day visitors that year—or 209,646—were also from out-of-state, the total number of out-of-state visitors would be 282,144.

This estimate of Texas out-of-state visitors is especially conservative when compared to estimates from other states. A study from the University of Missouri indicated that out-of-state visitors to that state's parks accounted for about 21 percent of the total number of visitors. The same study cited other work that determined that about 32 percent of the visitors to West Virginia state parks were from out-of-state.<sup>9</sup>

A gain to the state economy of more than \$5 million is the result of the direct expenditures by out-of-state overnight visitors when the number of these visitors is multiplied by an estimated per-day, per-visitor expenditure of \$29.30

derived from the estimates in the Texas A&M study. Another \$10.4 million gain to the state economy is the result of estimating the number of out-of-state day use visitors multiplied by an estimated per-day, per-visitor expenditure of \$49.77, also derived from the Texas A&M

### **EXHIBIT 8**

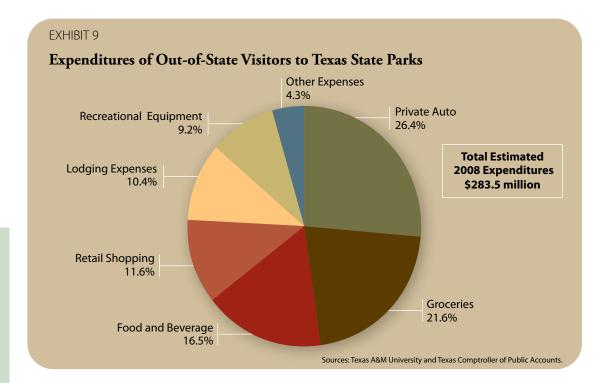
# Effect of State Parks on Taxable Sales in Rural Counties, Fiscal 2006 (2008 dollars)

	Mean per capita taxable retail sales
Rural Counties With At Least One State Park	\$6,544
Rural Counties With No State Park	\$5,698
Difference	\$846
Difference (percent)	14.8

Note: Difference is statistically significant at the 10 percent confidence level.

Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

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### **Mustang Island State Park**

Five miles of undeveloped Gulf of Mexico beaches are the prime attraction at Mustang Island State Park and a perfect family destination. The park brought \$3,653,707 in sales to Nueces County in 2006, \$2,016,781 in personal income, \$18,269 to county sales tax coffers and 66.4 jobs.

"The park is a jewel in the rough because so much more could be done to invest in additional amenities to the park."

Ann Vaughn, executive director, Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce

July 23, 2008

study.<sup>11</sup> **Exhibit 9** illustrates what goods and services out-of-state visitors purchase.

To determine the total impact of out-of-state visitors on the Texas economy, the estimated direct impacts were incorporated into an economic forecasting and policy analysis program.<sup>12</sup> The results are illustrated in **Exhibit 10**.

Out-of-state visitor expenditures generate more than \$15.7 million in the Texas economy annually. This activity is estimated to create \$7.9 million in personal income and about 288 new jobs each year.

### Environmental Impact of Urban State Parks

Parks provide social amenities because of their aesthetic appeal. They also provide remedies to environmental problems such as storm water runoff and pollution. Trees and shrubs intercept rain as it falls to the ground, allowing water to evaporate or be absorbed. Also, the pervious groundcover of soil and vegetation mitigates runoff through rainwater absorption. Trees, shrubs and other vegetation also provide air quality benefits by removing

from the atmosphere pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide.<sup>13</sup>

These problems of storm water runoff and pollution lead to production losses from flooding damage and health care costs associated with treatment of pollution-related diseases and can diminish economic activity. <sup>14</sup> The economic consequences of these problems are more pronounced in metropolitan areas, where pollution can be more severe and runoff is accelerated by impervious surfaces such as buildings and roads.

The prevention and remediation of storm water runoff and pollution entails costs to state and local governments and taxpayers. By minimizing these problems, parkland provides a real economic benefit; by minimizing abatement costs parks make tax dollars available for other purposes.

To estimate this economic impact, Comptroller staff estimated the cost of storm water and pollution control that would be necessary in the absence of state parks. This analysis included state parkland located in metropolitan areas, since that

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is where storm water runoff and pollution represent a significant public cost. The costs associated with storm water and pollution control in Texas metropolitan areas were incorporated into an economic modeling program to determine the economic activity generated by savings on these expenditures.

Direct expenditures associated with storm water management and air pollution removal were obtained from an analysis of San Antonio's urban ecosystem by the organization American Forests. While American Forests has conducted several urban ecosystem analyses for several cities in Texas, the costs associated with air pollution removal and constructing a storm water management system for San Antonio was chosen as a proxy for all metropolitan state parks in Texas. <sup>16</sup>

Ecologically, San Antonio represents a middlepoint between the humid and rainy Houston region and the more arid regions of West Texas. San Antonio also represents a middle point between



### **EXHIBIT 10**

# Estimated State Impact Out-of-State Visitors to State Parks

Type of Impact	Value
Gross State Product (2008 Dollars)	\$15,716,000
Total Personal Income (2008 Dollars)	\$7,934,000
Total Employment	288.1

Sources: Texas A&M University and Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

### EXHIBIT 11

### Estimated Economic Impact of Urban State Parks: Environmental Benefits on the State Economy

Type of Impact	Value
Gross State Product (2008 Dollars)	\$233,625,000
Total Personal Income (2008 Dollars)	\$153,700,000
Total Employment	3,906

Sources: American Forests, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

the major metropolitan regions with significant air quality issues and less populated metropolitan regions with fewer such problems.<sup>17</sup>

To estimate the value of environmental savings at the state level, the sum of the costs associated with air pollution removal and the construction of a storm water system was divided by the total tree cover acreage in the San Antonio region. This would generate a per acre value of approximately \$1,963. This is then multiplied by the number of acres in Texas state parks in metropolitan counties. <sup>18</sup> On the basis of this acreage (81,181 acres), the estimated monetary value to the state of remediation associated with metropolitan state parks in Texas is more than \$159 million annually.

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# **Destination: Texas**

Studying the total economic impact of park-related spending may yield valuable analyses for state legislators and economists, but it may not fully describe what this spending means to park visitors or those that depend on them for their livelihood.

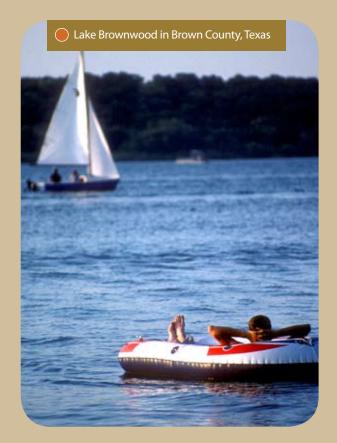
So imagine that a family of four—two adults and two children under the age of 13—from the Tulsa, Oklahoma area visited Lake Brownwood State Park in Brown County one week during the 2008 summer season. According to 2006 data from the Texas A&M study converted to 2008 dollars, this family would spend approximately \$872 in Brown County:

- \$42 on park fees;
- \$557 on the cabin rental and hotel occupancy tax;
- \$154 on groceries and beverages;
- \$23 on recreational equipment;
- \$11 on retail items, and
- \$85 on auto and incidental expenses.

If other out-of-county visitors to Lake Brownwood spend the same amount in 2008, Brown County grocers would see \$199,000 in sales attributable to the park visitors; restaurateurs

\$188,000; sporting goods vendors \$58,000; retailers about \$29,000; the park and local hotel and motel owners about \$196,000; auto-related businesses about \$188,000 and other businesses about \$25,000.

Extrapolating these impacts to the county, total sales attributable to park visitors and its subsequent effects on all other businesses would be almost \$2 million, generating nearly \$10,000 in local sales tax. Brown County residents would realize a total \$1.1 million in personal income. The total number of jobs attributable to park visitor spending would be 20.8 fulltime equivalents (FTEs). Added to the 20.3 FTEs employed by the park itself, 41.1 FTEs would have been employed.<sup>19</sup>



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Incorporating these savings into an economic model for Texas translates into more than \$233 million of goods and services produced by businesses in the state. This level of economic activity generates almost \$154 million in total personal income and slightly more than 3,900 jobs statewide (Exhibit 11).

### Other Environmental Benefits

State parks provide many environmental benefits. They preserve the state's biodiversity and provide a vital home for varied plant and animal life. Many parks collaborate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by providing habitat for threatened and endangered species designated under the federal Endangered Species Act. Among these species to be found in Texas state parks are the ocelot (a medium-sized spotted cat), the jaguarundi (a small, slender-bodied cat), the golden-cheeked warbler, the peregrine falcon, the Houston toad and several species of desert spring fish. The chain of state parks in South Texas called the World Birding Center provides seasonal homes to about 500 species of migrating birds.

As urban and exurban areas expand in Texas, parks become increasingly important because they prevent the development of open space. Preserving the aesthetic beauty of Texas' rural and undeveloped areas is vital to ensure that Texas remains a place where families desire to live and work.

As noted above, parks also provide important health benefits by improving the environment. Trees, shrubs and other plants remove carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide from the atmosphere. Parks, particularly those located in or near urban areas, can improve air quality by preserving and cultivating plant life. In addition, their open spaces provide important water quality benefits such as storm water mitigation, water quality improvement, in-stream environmental flow enhancement and groundwater recharge. Many state parks, such as Caddo Lake State Park in deep east Texas and Garner State Park in southwestern Texas, are vital to the preservation of naturally flowing rivers, creeks and streams, allowing nature to cleanse waters for downstream use. These properties enhance the quality and quantity of Texas' precious water resources. Some of these factors can be quantified, based on existing research.

### **World Birding Centers**

The three new parks comprising the World Birding Center in the Lower Rio Grande Valley are only beginning to realize their promise. One local nature tourism expert predicts that every 10,000 visitors to the Center will provide \$3.8 million in direct expenditures in the area, \$9.3 million in gross economic output, 156 full-time jobs, \$407,548 in state tax revenues and \$287,133 in local tax revenues.

"Nature tourism offers the LRGV [Lower Rio Grande Valley] an opportunity to both restore natural habitats and create critically needed jobs."

Ted Eubanks, chief executive officer, Fermata, Inc., Houston

"All the trails, bike paths, everything is connected to and related to the park; the park is the gel that ties the whole community together."

Mike Rhodes, Rhodes Enterprises, Inc., Edinburg July 24, 2008

"I don't know what it says," she said, viewing a Japanese nature tourism periodical, "but I know it's talking about this area."

Martha Noell, president and chief executive officer, Weslaco Chamber of Commerce

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Finally, parks facilitate a respect for nature among those who come to visit them. To develop the next generation of environmental stewards, Texas parks employees work hard to teach visitors about low-impact camping, respect for wildlife, protection of plant life, litter prevention and other outdoor ethical questions. Through their exposure to these unique natural places, Texans from all walks of life will recognize that these assets must be treasured and protected.

### **Other Positive Effects of State Parks**

Parks provide still other significant benefits, some not easily quantified, related to economic development, public recreation, cultural preservation, public health and environmental conservation.

### Economic Development Benefits

In addition to the quantitative data discussed above, qualitative evidence suggests state parks have a positive economic impact on surrounding communities. The Comptroller's team conducted interviews with representatives from economic development, real estate and tourism interests in several Texas communities located near state parks, and found uniform support

for the parks. Economic development officials suggested that their regions benefit substantially from the economic spillover associated with state parks in their region.

A strong system of public parks is vital to an amenities-based economic development strategy. Urban dwellers represent an increasing demand for public parks and recreation, and a strong public parks system helps to make Texas a desirable place to live. Many knowledge- and creativity-sector workers demand access to recreational amenities, and public parks help the state recruit and retain these highly sought workers. Academics, community leaders and business officials all suggest that a first-rate system of public parks can help with business recruitment and expansion.

According to economist Richard Florida:

Quality-of-place—particularly natural, recreational, and lifestyle amenities—is absolutely vital in attracting knowledge workers and in supporting leading-edge high technology firms and industries. Knowledge workers essentially

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balance economic opportunity and lifestyle in selecting a place to live and work. Thus, quality-of-place factors are as important as traditional economic factors such as jobs and career opportunity in attracting knowledge workers in high technology fields. Given that they have a wealth of job opportunities, knowledge workers have the ability to choose cities and regions that are attractive places to live as well as work.<sup>20</sup>

Recent academic research has shown that quality-of-life considerations play an important role in many companies' location decisions. In particular, "footloose" companies are especially sensitive to the amenities offered by potential sites. These knowledge- and service-sector firms are not tied to traditional considerations such as raw materials, natural resources or shipping infrastructure. Instead they are concerned first and foremost with attracting and retaining a highly educated work force. In fact, substantial evidence suggests that

companies located in regions with a substandard quality of life must pay salary premiums to recruit and retain the workers that they need.<sup>21</sup>

A 1997 article by John Crompton, Lisa Love, and Thomas More for the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* confirmed that quality-of-life considerations are important in business location decisions and that public parks are among the most important of these factors.

In this study, researchers surveyed officials from 174 businesses that had relocated, expanded or been launched in Colorado in the preceding five years. These officials reported that quality of life was the most important consideration in their decisions, and that parks, recreation and open space were the second most significant element in evaluating a location's quality of life. Parks trailed only cost of living in importance for evaluating quality of life, and were more important than such considerations as primary/secondary education, personal safety, cultural opportunities and health care services. Among small businesses, parks were the *most important* quality-of-life attribute. 23

### Palo Duro Canyon State Park

The "Grand Canyon of Texas" in Armstrong and Randall counties is a natural wonder appreciated by over 300,000 visitors in 2007. The park also boosted the local economy in Randall County in 2006 with \$9,397,441 in retail sales, \$4,796,420 in personal income, \$18,795 in county sales tax revenues and 224.4 jobs.

"Palo Duro Canyon State Park one of the Panhandle's primary tourist attractions. We feature the park very prominently in virtually all of the literature that the Convention and Visitors Council sends out."

Jerry Holt, vice president, Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council June 19, 2008

# The Economic Impact of Local Parks Programs

In addition to its funding of TPWD's state parks system, the state also provides about \$50 million in local park grants in the fiscal 2008-09 biennium. <sup>24</sup> TPWD awards these funds directly to local jurisdictions. Evidence suggests that these investments also pay healthy dividends.

A December 2006 study by the Perryman Group, commissioned by the Texas Parks and Recreation Foundation, found that local parks across the state have led to the creation of more than 45,000 jobs through maintenance and operations, capital investment and tourism. The report also found that local parks activity generates \$171.6 million in revenue for state government each year.

According to the report, "local parks and recreation programs not only improve the quality of life of current residents, they also enhance economic development prospects," particularly for "knowledge-based industries." In addition, the report found that local parks increase the real estate values of residential and commercial property abutting a park area by approximately 20 percent.<sup>25</sup>

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These findings indicate that Texas stands to lose out on economic development opportunities if its system of state and city parks does not keep pace with business and worker expectations. This lesson hit home dramatically for Dallas in 2001, when the city lost out to Chicago in its bid to recruit the new corporate headquarters of Boeing Company.

In announcing its choice of Chicago, Boeing stated that the city's superior quality of life was influential in its decision. The relative lack of public parkland in and around Dallas was a factor cited by Boeing in its decision. The loss of the Boeing relocation spurred city leaders and private interests in Dallas to reevaluate and expand the city's parkland. The experience also put momentum behind the Trinity River Project, a proposal to reclaim the Trinity River and create one of the country's largest urban parks near downtown Dallas. 28

Local officials, business leaders, health advocates, education professionals and environmental activists in Houston have joined together to form a group called Houston Wilderness. This nonprofit organization is working to create a greenbelt of open space that one day will completely surround the greater Houston area. These leaders recognize the untapped potential of southeast Texas as a hub for recreation and ecotourism, and know that there is a need to protect open space in the greater Houston area as development expands. According to Rosie Zamora, the organization's president who also sits on the board of the Greater Houston Partnership, her industry partners recognize that "green is in" and that the region must get serious about investing in parkland if Houston is going to remain a desirable place for workers to live.<sup>29</sup>

# Public Recreation, Health and Cultural Benefits

Public parks expand recreational and cultural opportunities by providing Texans with accessible vacation options. State parks allow all Texans to enjoy recreational opportunities on the state's coastline, in its mountains, along its rivers and near its scenic lakes. Furthermore, parks offer an affordable vacation alternative close to home for many Texas families, a significant consideration during a period of record-high gasoline prices.

A public parks system is important so that all Texans can enjoy activities such as camping, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, biking and swimming. These and other recreational pursuits provide important public health benefits for Texans. The emerging field of "ecopsychology" links exposure to nature to mental and physical health. Several studies have shown that time spent outdoors can ease stress, anxiety and depression.<sup>30</sup>

The link between physical activity and improved health is well documented, just as a lack of physical activity contributes to obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other health problems. Research has shown that access and proximity to parks may increase the likelihood that people will exercise, leading to an "increase in aerobic capacity, along with weight loss, a reduction in body fat, improvements in flexibility, and an increase in perceived energy."31 Easy access to public parks can encourage families to take greater advantage of these healthy recreational activities, resulting in actual health care cost savings. A study conducted for the city of Philadelphia estimated that public parks in that city provided residents with approximately \$69 million in health savings in 2007 alone.<sup>32</sup>

Parks also preserve Texas' most treasured historical and cultural resources, which provide valuable educational opportunities for each new generation. Among these assets is San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site, at the site of the battle that won Texas its independence. The Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm at the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site in Stonewall recreates Texas farm life of more than a century ago, complete with actual period homes, a working blacksmith shop, vegetable gardens and livestock pens.

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Other parks are in themselves historic, such as Fort Richardson in Jacksboro. And Dinosaur Valley State Park in Glen Rose preserves dinosaur footprints made about 113 million years ago in an ancient riverbed. Preservation of cultural and natural resources such as these will instill an important sense of state and national pride for future generations of Texans.

### **Endnotes**

- John L. Crompton, "The Impact of Parks and Open Spaces on Property Taxes," in *The Economic Benefits* of Land Conservation, ed. Constance T. F. deBrun (San Francisco, California: The Trust for Public Land, March 2007), p.1, http://www.tpl.org/content\_documents/econbens\_landconserve.pdf. (Last visited August 20, 2008.)
- Robert A. Harper, Theodore H. Schmudde and Frank H. Thomas, "Recreation Based Economic Development and the Growth-Point Concept," *Land Econom*ics (February 1966), p. 95.
- Robert A. Harper, Theodore H. Schmudde and Frank H. Thomas, "Recreation Based Economic Development and the Growth-Point Concept," p. 95.
- Texas Coalition for Conservation, *The Economic Contributions of Texas State Parks in FY 2006*, by John L. Crompton and Juddson Culpepper, Texas A&M University, Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences (Austin, Texas, December 2006), p. 1, http://rptsweb.tamu.edu/faculty/Crompton/Crompton/Articles/3.10.pdf. (Last visited August 20, 2008.)
- On average, non-local visitors spent \$1.6 million in a county with a state park. Average park budget expenditures were estimated close to \$512,000 at the county level.
- Texas counties were classified as rural based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Code, http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/ rurality/ruralurbcon. (Last visited August 20, 2008.)
- Dividing the total direct expenditures by the number of jobs in this exhibit, rural county salaries averaged about \$32,000 annually while similar metropolitan county salaries averaged slightly under \$36,000.
- Based on information from the Texas Workforce Commission, "Texas Labor Market Information," http://www.tracer2.com/cgi/dataanalysis. March 2007 employment for the average rural county in Texas was 7,487. The average number of employed people in a metropolitan county was 125,153.
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources, 2002 State Economic Impacts of Missouri State Park Visitors: Project Completion Report, by Shu Tian Cole, C. Randal Vessell, and Tao Zhu, University of Missouri-Columbia, Department of Parks, Recreation, and

- Tourism-School of Natural Resources (Columbia, Missouri, February 2003), pp. 2, 4, http://www.mostateparks.com/econimpact.doc. (Last visited September 16, 2008.)
- Based on the Texas A&M study, the 2008 inflation adjusted average per-person, per-day expenditure by non-local visitors to state parks is \$44.93. Based on the IMPLAN model for Texas, it was estimated that about 65 percent of the value of retail expenditures and 67 percent of accommodation expenditures are local in nature. The remaining shares of these expenditure values are allocated to out-of-area industries that supply retail goods to the local retailers. Hence, in this analysis only \$29.30 of the daily retail and accommodation expenditures of \$44.93 was used to estimate the economic impact of out-of-state overnight visitor expenditures. It should be noted that overnight visitors spent approximately 2.43 days in the park. This puts the per-person direct expenditure at roughly \$71.20.
- In the case of out-of-state day use visitors, only \$49.77 of the \$76.26 retail and accommodation expenditures was used to estimate the economic impact of out-of-state day use visitors.
- These estimates are derived using the Regional Economic Models Inc. (REMI) Policy Insight model, a computable general equilibrium economic model that estimates the impact of changes in policy variables, such as increased retail expenditures, on components of the Texas economy. These components include industry production, demand for inputs (labor and capital), migration and supply of labor, prices and wages and trade.
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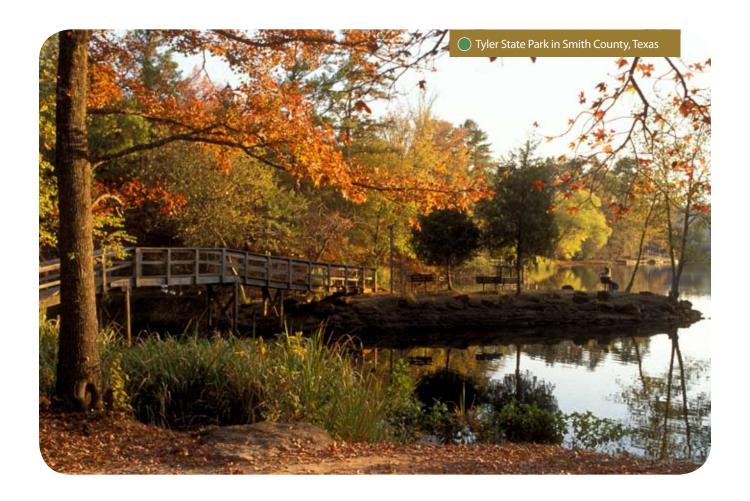
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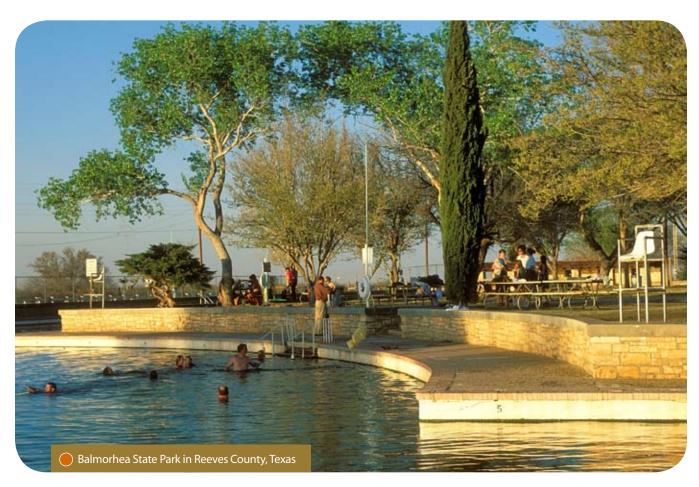


# STATE PARK PROFILES

### Introduction

Analyzing economic data and reports provided Comptroller staff with very useful information on local impacts from state parks, but nothing substitutes for face-to-face interviews. In June and July, 2008, staff visited 18 state parks and interviewed park superintendents, regional, county and city economic development officials and local business owners to get the full story about each park's role in its region. These park profiles provide anecdotal evidence about the influence of parks on nearby economies.







In 2007, park attendance was about 52,000, evenly distributed between day users and overnight visitors.

### Balmorhea State Park Reeves County



Balmorhea State Park is located in far West Texas in the community of Toyahvale, four miles west of Balmorhea. The 45.9-acre park's main attraction is San Solomon Springs, a spring-fed pool that covers 1.75 acres with a year-round water temperature between 72 to 76 degrees. The pool holds 3.5 million gallons, but anywhere from 22 million to 28 million gallons of fresh water flow through the pool every day. The deeper parts of the pool are in a natural state, allowing swimmers to enjoy the fish and aquatic vegetation. The park also includes the Cienega Project, a spring-fed desert wetland and canals that are home to endangered fish, a variety of aquatic life, turtles, birds and other animals.

The springs provided water to the American Indians and later to the Mexican farmers who used the water for their crops and dug the first irrigation canals. In the mid-1800s, the springs were called Mescalero Springs after the Apache Indians in the area, but later the Mexican farmers renamed them San Solomon Springs. Today, the clear and cool waters attract numerous swimmers and scuba divers to the area. In fiscal 2007, park attendance was about 52,000, evenly distributed between day users and overnight visitors. The park and the pool are popular with Texas and New Mexico residents. Groups enjoy coming to the park from the nearby Buffalo Trail Scout Ranch and the Historic Prude Ranch.

In addition to the springs, the park includes a concession building, two bathhouses, the super-intendent's residence and San Solomon Courts

- State Park Profiles -

Motel, all built in Spanish Colonial style. The pool and other structures in the park were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the early 1930s. By helping to preserve these CCC structures, the park is playing an important role in safeguarding the nation's heritage.

The springs are a magnet for scuba divers and dive instructors in Texas and New Mexico. At 20 feet deep, with a horizontal clarity of 80 to 100 feet and constant water temperatures, the springs provide a predictable environment for divers. Lead Park Ranger Tony Fleenor says, "We have divers year-round. In the off season, fall and winter, divers are our bread and butter."

Neta Rhyne, the owner of the Toyahvale Desert Oasis dive shop, adjoining the park, says, "I like to refer to San Solomon Springs as the only dive site that provides entertainment for the whole family. One can swim, scuba dive, snorkel, sunbathe, bird watch, picnic, play in the playground, sit under a shade tree by the spring, camp and enjoy the beautiful sunrises and sunsets."

Balmorhea State Park also plays an important role in the economic wellbeing of the surrounding communities of Toyahvale and Balmorhea, with a combined population of just over 500. "The state park has a significant positive economic impact on local businesses," says Balmorhea City Manager Terry Upshur. "The park attracts tourists to the area, increasing business for local hotel/motels, grocery stores and restaurants."

Local area retailer Rhyne says, "My business would not exist without the park, which is the main economic catalyst for the local economy. Many other area businesses would be unable to survive without the park."

In fiscal 2007, the park reported operating expenses of \$443,735 for staff salaries and minor repairs, and revenues of \$657,837, for a net operating gain of \$214,102.9

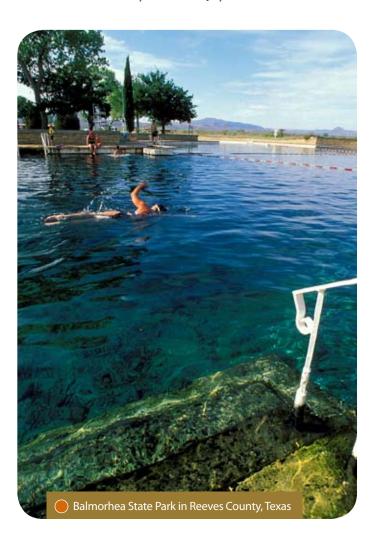
According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Balmorhea State Park contributed \$961,316 in sales and \$522,195 in personal income to Reeves County in 2006. The park also created 19.5 jobs and generated \$4,806 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year.<sup>10</sup>

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Balmorhea State Park contributed \$961,316 in sales and \$522,195 in personal income to Reeves County in 2006.



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### Summary Economic Impacts Balmorhea State Park, Reeves County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$961,316	\$522,195	19.5	\$4,806

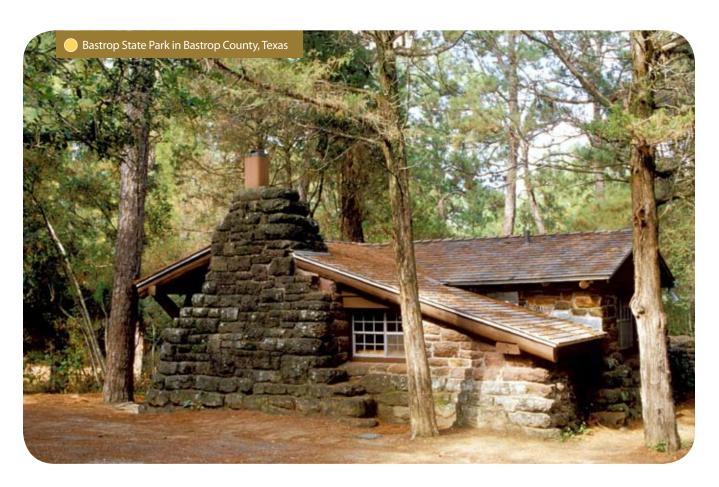
<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$657,837	\$443,735	\$214,102

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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### Bastrop and Buescher State Parks Bastrop County



Bastrop County is rare in that it has two conjoined state parks, Bastrop and Buescher (pronounced "Bisher"). The larger Bastrop State Park meets Buescher State Park via the scenic 12-mile Park Road 1C. The main entrance to the 5,926-acre Bastrop State Park is located within the limits of the city of Bastrop, although the park itself extends well outside the city.

Bastrop State Park hosts numerous attractions, including an 18-hole public golf course, a public swimming pool, hiking trails, a lake for fishing and canoeing and rustic cabins built when the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) developed the park in

the 1930s. Bastrop State Park is one of only six state parks in the U.S. designated as a National Historic Landmark. It was recognized as such because it represents a showcase for the impressive and aesthetically appealing work of the CCC in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

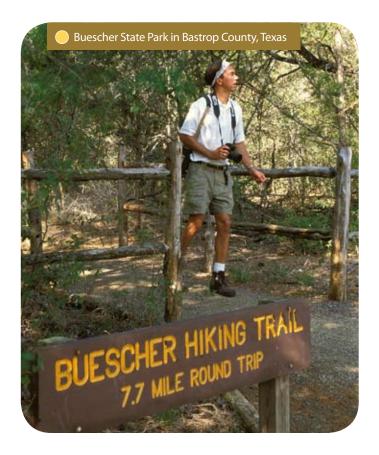
The 1,017-acre Buescher State Park provides fishing, hiking and camping and a quieter atmosphere than Bastrop's park.<sup>2</sup> Both parks serve as vital habitat for the Houston toad, a threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>3</sup>

Bastrop is one of the state's most-visited parks, with an estimated 160,000 to 180,000 visitors annually. Most of these are recreational vehicle (RV) enthusiasts or overnight campers. The park is also one of the few parks in the state whose revenues fully cover its expenses. Its campsites with utility hookups are fully occupied on weekends year-round, often by "Winter Texans" and other RV users.



Bastrop is one of the state's most-visited parks, with an estimated 160,000 to 180,000 visitors annually.

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Bastrop State Park's pool is a popular destination for local families and visitors Bastrop and Buescher Park Superintendent Todd McClanahan is quick to note the important role that the state park plays in the Bastrop community. Bastrop State Park's pool is a popular destination for local families and visitors, as it is the county's only public swimming pool. The park is also a popular destination for scout troops and orienteering or "competitive navigation" groups. It hosts a month-long new officer academy for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department peace officers in its conference facility. McClanahan predicts that higher gas prices may lead to increased visitation at the park, as more families from nearby cities choose to travel less and vacation closer to home. <sup>4</sup>

Local businesspeople and community members echo McClanahan's enthusiasm. Joe Newman of the Bastrop Economic Development Corp. says that the park is extremely popular with area citizens, and an important part of the community's identity. For instance, the route of the BP MS 150, an annual Houston-to-Austin bike tour that raises

funds for multiple sclerosis research, passes through the scenic "lost pines" of Bastrop and Buescher state parks on Park Road 1C. This is an important source of pride for the community and a pleasant experience for those participating in the event.<sup>5</sup>

Susan Weems Wendel, president of the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce, considers the parks "tremendous assets that benefit the community." Besides the MS 150, the "Pedal through the Pines" bicycle event each March brings 1,300 bicyclists to town, and most of them stay at the park. Wendel says the chamber makes sure the parks have racks of brochures touting local hotels and events because "we like cross-pollination — we make sure they come to both."

She finds that many local businesses such as restaurants and bed and breakfasts prosper from proximity to the parks. Visitors who stay at the park are likely to go into town for supplies, dinner, shopping and other activities, generating significant economic activity for area merchants. The half-million annual visitors to Bastrop are an important part of the region's economic development strategy. "Bastrop would be less of a destination without the state parks," says Wendel.<sup>6</sup>

Kevin White, president of the Bastrop Board of Realtors, says that in his experience, some people who move to the area do so due to their fond memories of visiting Bastrop State Park when they were young. "So many people made a connection with Bastrop because of the state park," he says.

Visitors who stay at the park form positive impressions about the community, enhancing their image of the region. In addition, many people who work in Austin choose to live in Bastrop due to its natural amenities, including the parks.<sup>7</sup>

Bastrop State Park expects some big changes in the next few years. Bastrop is due to receive \$3.5 million in state funds for repairs and renovations, for projects like these:

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- Americans with Disabilities Act compliance throughout the park, including improvements at 10 to 15 campsites
- electrical rewiring in park cabins
- improvements for the park's dining and conference center facility
- vehicle acquisitions and repairs
- restroom repairs
- multiple repairs at the pool
- a new roof for the golf course pro shop and
- water and wastewater plumbing upgrades

These repairs will help preserve Bastrop State Park as a uniquely important community asset. McClanahan predicts that once these repairs are made, upkeep will be less expensive and the park can focus on providing new attractions for visitors. In particular, he points to increasing demand for expanded group camping facilities that can accommodate larger parties such as family reunions.<sup>8</sup>

Of the two state parks, Bastrop generates the most income. In 2007, revenues were \$817,385; operating expenses — excluding the costs for major repairs, capital and employee benefits — were \$813,074, leaving a modest \$4,311 net gain. Buescher's revenues that year were \$208,307 against operating expenses of \$210,849, leaving a small deficit of \$2,542 for the year.<sup>9</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton of Texas A&M University, Bastrop State Park contributed \$2,535,205 in sales and \$1,092,341 in

personal income to Bastrop County in 2006. The park also created 74.8 jobs and generated \$12,676 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year.<sup>10</sup>

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Bastrop State
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to Bastrop County
in 2006.

# Summary Economic Impacts Bastrop and Buescher State Parks, Bastrop County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$2,535,205	\$1,092,341	74.8	\$12,676

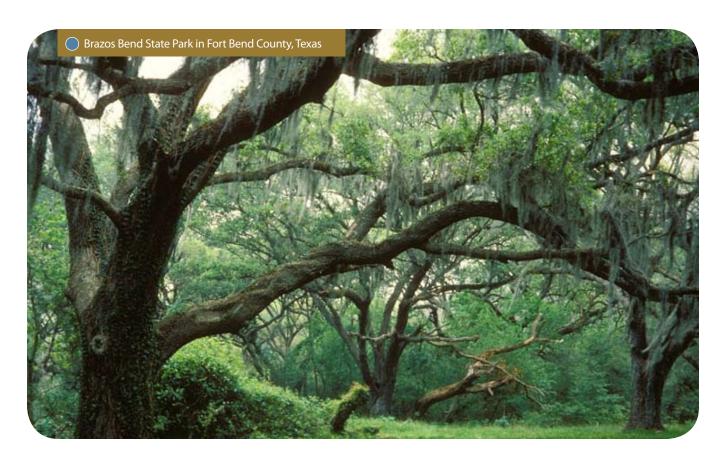
Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$1,025,692	\$1,023,923	\$1,769

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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Park staff estimate that there are 300 alligators greater than six feet in length at Brazos Bend State Park.

### Brazos Bend State Park Fort Bend County and Galveston Island State Park Galveston County



Editor's Note: Since our visit in the summer of 2008, Galveston Island State Park suffered significant damage during Hurricane Ike. As we go to print, TPWD is evaluating the condition of this park, and clean-up efforts are ongoing in the coastal region.

Many people associate Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city, with its status as a world capital for the energy industry, its massive port, its towering skyline, its popular sports franchises and its world-class art museums. The greater Houston area also boasts a collection of some of the most unique and diverse parks in the state, many of which are located within an hour's drive of downtown.

Staff from the Comptroller's office visited two of these parks: Brazos Bend State Park in Fort Bend County and Galveston Island State Park in Galveston County. Both are no more than an hour outside of Houston, though the two provide dramatically different experiences for their visitors.

Brazos Bend State Park is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Houston. The eastern border of the 5,000-acre park abuts the Brazos River for about three miles. The park is best known for its sizable population of alligators. Park staff estimate that there are 300 alligators greater than six feet in length at the park, and they are visible from several observation points near the park's six lakes throughout the year.

In addition to the bounty it offers wildlife enthusiasts, Brazos Bend is ideal for hikers, boasting 35 miles of trails that provide the only access to much of the park. Other recreational opportunities include fishing, mountain biking and

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horseback riding. Park staff is working on improving access to the Brazos River, which would open up additional recreational opportunities on the water. The park also hosts the George Observatory, one of the largest public observatories in the nation. Operated by the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the observatory allows public access to its facility on Saturday evenings. The park's remote location guarantees fantastic views of the night sky. The park has also collaborated closely with Houston Wilderness, a nonprofit organization that has brought together landowners, industry and governmental jurisdictions to create a green belt of open space that one day will completely surround the greater Houston area.

According to Steve Killian, park superintendent, the park has "big upside potential." Specifically, Killian would like to see additional funds so that the park's camping facilities could be expanded. He says he must turn away "thousands" of visitors a year because the park's 91 campsites fill up practically every weekend in the spring, early summer and fall. Killian estimates that doubling the number of Brazos Bend's camping sites would enable the park to generate even more revenue than it currently does. In fiscal 2007, the park brought in \$744,855, or \$32,562 more than its operating expenses.<sup>2</sup>

Even more than the lost revenue, Killian says that the most disappointing thing about turning away eager campers is the knowledge that these visitors will lose out on a unique and rewarding experience. Killian says many of their visitors come from Houston, and the wilderness experience that they get at Brazos Bend simply cannot be found in an urban setting. Killian recognizes that the children visiting Brazos Bend State Park on field trips, scout expeditions and family vacations will grow up to be the next generation of Texas leaders. Killian says "exposure to nature and education about the importance of environmental conservation that visitors receive when visiting Brazos Bend will help build a sense of environmental stewardship that those visitors might miss out on in the city."

Killian has sought to cater as much as possible to day users, since their experience is not constricted by the park's shortage of camping sites. Of the park's approximately 200,000 annual visitors, Killian estimates that roughly three-quarters are day-users.

The park offers a fun, educational and inexpensive day out for families in the Houston area. With that in mind, Killian would like to see additional emphasis focused on advertising and marketing for state parks, particularly in urban areas where citizens have so many activities competing for their attention.

Even if a large-scale advertising campaign is not possible, Killian suggests that his agency should collaborate with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) so that parks are featured more prominently on official state road maps. Currently, TxDOT maps only identify parks by a number, which is cross-referenced with a list of names. On the other hand, national parks such as Big Bend National Park and Guadalupe Mountains National Park are featured more prominently on these maps. In addition, Killian suggests that Texas should emulate the state of Arkansas, which identifies state parks on road signs with a unique descriptive icon.<sup>3</sup>

Galveston Island State Park is located south of Houston within the city limits of Galveston and encompasses 2,013 acres of land.<sup>4</sup> The park includes approximately one and a half miles of coast along the Gulf of Mexico south of FM 3005 and extends to Galveston Bay on the north side of the highway. Bordered on both sides by beach homes, condominiums and other development, the park is the only segment of Galveston Island on which there remains an undeveloped, unobstructed corridor between the coast and the bay.<sup>5</sup>

Galveston Island State Park is one of the most heavily visited parks in Texas. In fiscal 2007 the park saw 243,560 visitors, of whom 105,697 stayed overnight.<sup>6</sup> In that year the park received \$1,166,205



Galveston Island State Park is one of the most heavily visited parks in Texas.

State Park Profiles -

One primary conservation priority at Galveston Island State Park is the restoration and preservation of the unique coastal prairie ecosystem.

in revenue, or \$418,648 more than its operating expenses. This was the third largest revenue surplus of any state park that year, trailing only Garner State Park and Enchanted Rock State Natural Area.<sup>7</sup>

Along with other Houston-area parks like Brazos Bend State Park and San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site, one primary conservation priority at Galveston Island State Park is the restoration and preservation of the unique coastal prairie ecosystem. Although coastal prairie once covered 6.5 million acres in southeast Texas, only 1 percent of that amount remains due to development, overgrazing and other forms of degradation. The prairie provides essential habitat for numerous wildlife species, including hundreds of species of migratory birds, making the prairie's preservation important to the biological diversity of southeast Texas.

Galveston Island provides numerous amenities for its visitors. Most guests enjoy relaxing on the coast and swimming in the Gulf. However, the less heavily visited section of the park along the bay offers significant attractions of its own. There guests can engage in hiking, bird watching, mountain biking and fishing. Kayaking in Galveston Bay is another activity that has gained in popularity, particularly among day users. Park staff and volunteers recently built a ramp, making the bay fully accessible.

Galveston Island State Park is yet another Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) facility that is heavily dependent on volunteer support. A support group, Friends of Galveston Island State Park, regularly leads interpretive programs and nature hikes on the weekend and staffs the park's nature center, which otherwise would go unused. The group also has conducted fundraising drives, built new trails and observation decks and repaired existing facilities. Galveston Island State Park also participates in the park host program, where volunteers are provided a campsite to provide visitor contact services in campgrounds and facilitate ongoing service to the park.

The deterioration of facilities is one of the most pressing issues at Galveston Island State Park. The park has an iconic, aesthetically attractive architectural style reflected in all of its buildings, which were constructed when the park was acquired in the 1970s. Deterioration has been a major issue due to coastal erosion, salt water and humidity. Many facilities had fallen into serious disrepair because of failure to pay for the upkeep of the buildings. In particular, the park's restrooms needed to be replaced for several years. The condition of restroom facilities drove many visitor complaints, so this had become a major problem for the park.

Finally, in the 2008-09 budget, the park was appropriated enough money to completely renovate all of the park's restrooms and other facilities that needed repairs. Sufficient funding in the future is needed to ensure that restrooms and other facilities do not deteriorate.

Angela Deaton, Galveston Island State Park's superintendent, says that her park is very important to the economy of Galveston and surrounding communities. With campsites ranging from \$20 to \$25 per night, the park is one of the best deals in town for overnight visitors. Given that Galveston is such a popular tourist destination, the park almost certainly provides consumers who contribute to the island's economy. On the few occasions that the park has had to close to the public after storm damage, Deaton says that business owners from the nearby community of Jamaica Beach often contact her to inquire when the park is scheduled to reopen. Many visitors to the park will venture to Jamaica Beach to purchase groceries, rent kayaks or enjoy a meal at a restaurant.8

Texas First Bank president Sam Dell'Olio concurs in the park's importance to the area. "The raw acreage surrounding the park is between \$8,000 and \$10,000 per acre; the concrete buildings nearby are valued about \$180 per square foot. The park very definitely adds value to these properties.

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I think the park adds economic value to the whole Island, not just the West End."9

Evelyn Merz, chair of the Houston chapter of the Sierra Club, echoes the importance of state parks like Brazos Bend and Galveston Island to the Houston area. Her organization has participated in many programs with local parks to develop and repair the facilities. Her group has also sponsored "inner city outings" to encourage park use by citizens from the Houston region.

Merz speaks very highly of park staff at all of the Houston-area parks with whom her organization collaborates. She expresses concern that parks must rely so heavily on volunteers to perform many of the essential functions of the parks. For example, Merz is concerned that some parks, including Galveston Island, must rely heavily on volunteers for their interpretive programs, since park staff is obligated with the essential day-to-day activities of keeping the parks up and running. By educating and explaining the value of parks to children and other visitors, interpreters perform a vitally important service. A shortage of staff and a

redeployment of volunteers could mean that the programs would be abandoned.

Due to these and other concerns about the condition of state parks, Merz's organization was very involved in the lobbying push to direct increased funding to TPWD during the 2007 legislative session.

Echoing sentiments that were expressed by Brazos Bend Superintendent Steve Killian, Merz also would like to see increased emphasis on marketing state parks to Houston residents. She says that parks often host wonderful programs that would interest city kids and families, but there is little way for people to learn about the programs, due to a lack of radio and television advertising. Merz also emphasizes that it is important to establish a consistent base level of funding so that state parks do not hit the crisis point reached before the 2007 funding increase. <sup>10</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Brazos Bend State Park contributed



Brazos Bend State
Park contributed
\$2,116,078 in sales
and \$1,147,210 in
personal income
to Fort Bend County
in 2006.

### - State Park Profiles -

\$2,116,078 in sales and \$1,147,210 in personal income to Fort Bend County in 2006. The park also created 45.4 jobs and generated \$10,580 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. Galveston Island State Park contributed \$7,354,412 in sales and \$2,774,125 in personal income to Galveston County in 2006. The park also created 172.9 jobs and generated \$36,772 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. <sup>11</sup>

### **Endnotes**

- Interview with Steve Killian, park superintendent, Brazos Bend State Park, Fort Bend County, Texas, July 7, 2008.
- Data provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "Revenue Less Operating Costs, FY 2006-2007," with Texas Comptroller's office calculations. Amounts may not total due to rounding.
- Interview with Steve Killian, park superintendent, Brazos Bend State Park.

- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "Galveston Island State Park," p. 2, http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/ spdest/findadest/parks/galveston/. (Last visited September 18, 2008.)
- Interview with Angela Deaton, park superintendent, Galveston Island State Park, Galveston, Texas, July 7, 2008
- Data provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "State Park Sites, Acreage, and Visits," with Texas Comptroller's office calculations.
- Data provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, "Revenue Less Operating Costs, FY 2006-2007," with Texas Comptroller's office calculations.
- Interview with Angela Deaton, park superintendent, Galveston Island State Park.
- Interview with Sam Dell'Olio, president, Texas First Bank, Galveston, Texas, July 29, 2008.
- Interview with Evelyn Merz, group chair, Sierra Club Houston Regional Group, Houston, Texas, July 7, 2008.
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## **(1)**

Galveston Island State Park contributed \$7,354,412 in sales and \$2,774,125 in personal income to Galveston County in 2006.

### Summary Economic Impacts Brazos Bend State Park, Fort Bend County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$2,116,078	\$1,147,210	45.4	\$10,580

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$744,855	\$712,293	\$32,562

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

# Summary Economic Impacts Galveston State Park, Galveston County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$7,354,412	\$2,774,125	172.9	\$36,772

Source: Texas A&M University.

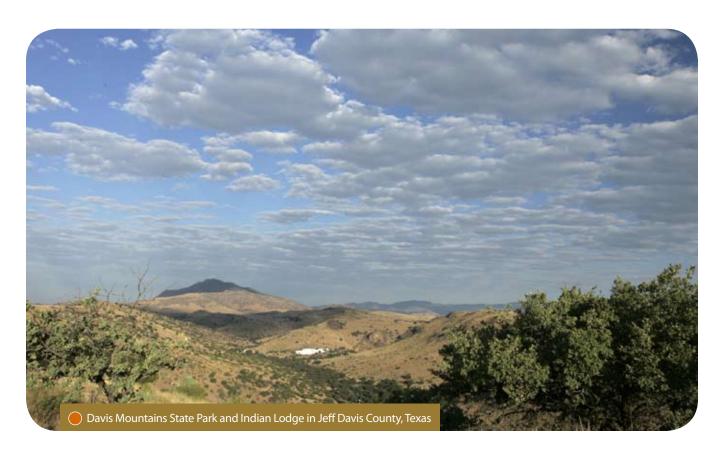
### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$1,166,205	\$747,557	\$418,648

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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- State Park Profiles -



### Davis Mountains State Park and Indian Lodge State Park Jeff Davis County



Davis Mountains State Park is located in far west Texas in the Big Bend country, among three major national parks — Guadalupe Mountains, Carlsbad Caverns and Big Bend. The 2,709-acre state park is located four miles outside of Fort Davis.

The park is located within the most extensive mountain range in Texas. Among its attractions are a six-mile scenic drive on Skyline Drive, two scenic overlooks and 12 miles of hiking trails, some of which connect with the Fort Davis National Historic Site. The park has a hike and bike trail and miles of primitive routes for backpacking. Visitors are allowed, with a permit, on Skyline Drive for stargazing. An additional 10 miles of backcountry hiking trails are available in the Limpia Canyon

Primitive Area. Keesey Creek flows through the state park, forming a picturesque canyon. Area visitors can also drive a scenic 74-mile loop that begins directly outside the park.<sup>1</sup>

The park has more than 100 campsites, including 27 full-service sites equipped with connections for electricity, cable television, water and sewer. According to Park Superintendent Maria Trevizo, the full-service sites will soon expand to include wireless Internet (Wi-Fi).

The park features an equestrian campsite, allowing visitors to bring their own horses to ride in the primitive areas. Trevizo says the park welcomes all pets.<sup>2</sup> In August 2006, the park was named one of the state's 10 most dog-friendly sites by *Texas Parks and Wildlife* magazine.<sup>3</sup>

Trevizo says the park is considered one of the top birding areas in the state, and every January the park hosts a public bow and arrow hunt for javelina. State Park Profiles -





In August 2007, Indian Lodge was named "Park of the Month" by the TPWD. The park offers many educational opportunities. Its amphitheater is the site of interpretive programs on flora and fauna. A park host is available at various times of the year to lead bird walks and nature walks for visitors and area school children.

Park visitors can participate in summer programs in June, July and August. The nearby Sul Ross State University Planetarium in Alpine provides stargazing programs in the park.

Retired Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) employees lend a hand providing educational programs on area wildlife such as snakes and pronghorn antelope.<sup>4</sup>

Portions of the park soar more than a mile above sea level. Although the park sits within the Northern Chihuahuan Desert, it gets an occasional snowfall in the winter months. Evenings are cool year-round, and visitors are advised to bring a jacket to wear after sunset.<sup>5</sup>

Indian Lodge is located within the Davis Mountains State Park. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built the 39-unit lodge in the 1930s. The lodge was originally 16 units built in the style of a Southwestern Native American pueblo. Some of the rooms are furnished with handmade cedar furniture. In 1967, Indian Lodge underwent a major renovation and modernization. It was refurbished again in 2006.

According to Superintendent Al Tobola, the lodge was completely booked the day after it opened following the renovations. Currently reservations are recommended three to six months in advance. The lodge is already fully booked for some dates in July 2009.<sup>6</sup> In August 2007, Indian Lodge was named "Park of the Month" by the TPWD. The lodge offers a swimming pool for guests. The full-service restaurant "The Black Bear" is not limited to inn guests and serves all visitors.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the Fort Davis area one of a

- State Park Profiles -

"Dozen Distinctive Destinations" and noted the state park and its attractions as one of the distinctive features of Fort Davis. To receive the designation, communities must provide cultural and recreational experiences different from the typical vacation destination.<sup>8</sup>

Davis Mountains State Park had 98,101 visitors in 2007. Guests at Indian Lodge are not charged an entrance fee.

The park and its sister facility, the Indian Lodge, frequently end the year with positive net revenue. In 2007, revenues were \$359,950 for the Davis Mountains State Park. Operating expenses — excluding the costs for major capital repairs and employee benefits — were \$352,705, leaving a modest \$7,245 net gain. Indian Lodge's revenues in 2007 were \$1,356,985, against operating expenses of \$1,258,553, leaving a net gain of \$98,432 for the year. <sup>10</sup>

Davis Mountains State Park and Indian Lodge are vital parts of the community. According to Lisa Nugent, executive director of the Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce,

"Our community could not survive without the state park."

Nugent says the motel and hotel tax generated by visitors coming to the park benefits the Fort Davis community. "The state park and the tourism it brings help keep area folks employed," says Nugent. "This economic benefit allows local residents to remain in the area by earning income from the park."

According to Nugent, "This year travel is down across Texas by 12 percent. But at the same time, travel to Fort Davis is up 12 percent due in part to the attraction of the Davis Mountains State Park.

"Families are not taking as many (vacation) breaks during the year," she adds. "Instead they are extending their stay an extra day or two." Superintendent Trevizo concurs, saying that park visitation and entrance fee collections are up from last year. Superintendent Tobola says that high gas prices have not deterred guests from visiting Indian Lodge; the number of guests here continues to match historic patterns.

Trevizo says the area's cool weather, even in summer, helps attract guests. Trevizo says the park's average daytime temperature ranges from the low to middle 80s, and nighttime temperatures drop to 60 degrees.

Nugent estimates that about 80 percent of visitors to the area are Texans, with the remaining guests coming from neighboring states and as far away as New England.

The park sees visitors from the Midland/Odessa area, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston, Trevizo says. Lately the park has seen more visitors from Mexico.

The park hosts many Boy Scout, Girl Scout, YMCA Indian Princesses and Indian Guides campouts throughout March and August. Tervizo says the Boy Scouts especially like to hike from the Fort Davis Historical area into the park. University students come during spring break to catch up on schoolwork. They perform geological surveys, gather surveys on birds, conduct bird banding and collect insects, amphibians, grasses, flowers and rocks.

Nugent says she receives positive comments from visitors. "Once visitors come to the area, they are likely to return," she says. "Tourists come out and see one of the best state parks in the state."

Trevizo also notes return visitors. "I know we are far, but once people come, they don't want to leave and get back to their busy lives. We see generations of families come back year after year."

According to Nugent, "The Indian Lodge is the crown jewel of the state park's system. Without the



Davis Mountains State Park had 98,101 visitors in 2007.

### - State Park Profiles -

Black Bear restaurant at the Indian Lodge, we would have difficulty serving visitors to Fort Davis. The restaurant is an important part of the community."

"Because of the remoteness of the area and the limited number of food establishments, it would be very difficult to serve visitors who come for special events without the Black Bear," Nugent says.<sup>11</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton of Texas A&M University, Davis Mountains State Park contributed \$2,181,202 in sales and \$905,393 in personal income to Jeff Davis County in 2006. The park also created 56.6 jobs and generated \$10,906 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. Indian Lodge State Park contributed \$3,683,690 in sales and \$1,439,420 in personal income to Jeff Davis County in 2006. The park also created 96.8 jobs and \$18,418 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. <sup>12</sup>



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### Summary Economic Impacts Davis Mountains State Park and Indian Lodge State Park, Jeff Davis County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$5,864,892	\$2,344,813	153.4	\$29,324

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$1,716,935	\$1,611,258	\$105,677

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.



**Davis Mountains** 

\$2,181,202 in sales

and \$905,393 in

personal income

County in 2006.

to Jeff Davis

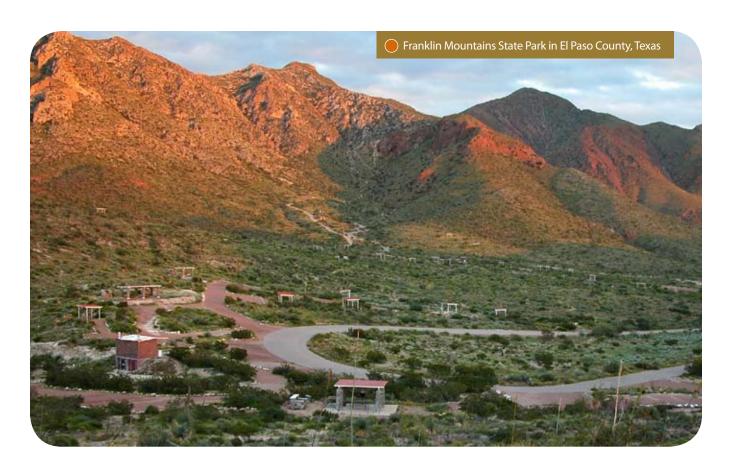
State Park

contributed

Indian Lodge State
Park contributed
\$3,683,690 in sales
and \$1,439,420 in
personal income to
Jeff Davis County in
2006.

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### Franklin Mountains State Park El Paso County



Franklin Mountains State Park, opened in 1987, is nestled against the combined bright lights of the twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Franklin Mountains is the largest recognized urban park in the United States at 24,247 acres.

The urban setting provides a scenic backdrop to the park area itself, and the occasional cloud cover and the periods of dawn and dusk create dramatic vistas. The Franklin Mountains, the largest mountain range in Texas, are the southernmost end of the Rocky Mountains and are set against beautiful desert landscapes. The weather in El Paso and the surrounding area provides a year-round warm climate for all who live there and visit. The state formally acquired Franklin Mountains in 1979 to protect the mountains from encroaching urban development. The park features the Wyler Aerial Tramway, a gondola system also operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department that provides a majestic view of the surrounding area at a height of 5,632 feet. The park offers 44 picnic sites and outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, camping, walking tours and cave exploration. Horseback riding trails are in development. The park also features many opportunities for birding. It is part of the central flyway for migratory birds traveling between Mexico, through Texas and into the Mountain West.

According to Cesar Mendez, Franklin Mountains superintendent, nearly 90 percent of park visitors are from the local area. Visitation and revenues have increased this year, he adds. Increased park access and expanded hiking trails have allowed more families, school groups and

State Park Profiles -





In fiscal 2007, the park saw almost 50,000 visitors

local organizations to visit the park this year than last.<sup>4</sup> In fiscal 2007, the park saw almost 50,000 visitors, and almost all of these were day users.<sup>5</sup> For 2007, Franklin Mountains' general operating expenses totaled \$242,352. Park revenues totaled \$57,266, resulting in an operating deficit of \$185,086.<sup>6</sup>

This year Franklin Mountains saw an increase in appropriations from the Legislature for park services, including an increase in staff from five to 10.5 FTEs. Visitors to the park feel secure knowing staff are out on the trails, Mendez says.

Park officials team up for events with many local entities. The park works with the El Paso Zoo as an outreach opportunity to teach conservation methods and practices to schoolchildren. Park officials also host joint events with staff of the El Paso Museum of Archeology to raise funds for the museum, which does not charge an entrance fee.<sup>7</sup>

According to Richard Dayoub, president and CEO of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce, the park "contributes to the quality of life of the surrounding area." As the park is no less

than 15 to 20 minutes away from surrounding residential areas, many local residents take the opportunity to use its trails on a regular basis. The amenities and conspicuous scenic beauty of the park attracts businesses searching for a high quality of life for employees and families.<sup>8</sup>

The Franklin Mountains' sister park, Hueco Tanks State Historic Site, situated some 30 minutes away, attracts international travelers and is widely recognized as one of the best sites in the world for "bouldering," a challenging variation of mountain climbing without safety ropes. In fiscal 2007, Hueco Tanks had 23,286 visitors.

Scott Culver of the Franklin Mountains Wilderness Coalition, a coalition of community organizations with equal interest in the park's continued history and preservation, states there are indirect financial benefits for several industries associated with Franklin Mountains and Hueco Tanks. This includes retailers in sporting goods and recreational services, such as mountain climbing equipment, bicycling equipment and horseback riding services. Some of the major bicycle shops in the area include Crazy Cat Cyclery and The Bicycle Company.

State Park Profiles -

These two companies directly benefit from riders who use the world-class mountain biking trails that wander through the park and the surrounding area.

Other industries that indirectly benefit include the feed industry, flight schools and flight services, and hotels and restaurants in close proximity to the parks. The Coalition hosts the annual Poppies Celebration to draw new funds to support further protection of areas surrounding the park. Each year the celebration brings some 2,000 people to the area, including local artists and organizations whose activities support the park. <sup>10</sup>

Hueco Tanks' fiscal 2007 revenues were \$124,969 against operating expenses of \$277,578, resulting in a net deficit of \$102,609. The Wyler Aerial Tramway earned \$249,777 the same year, against operating expenses of \$428,846, resulting in a net deficit of \$169,069.<sup>11</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton of Texas A&M University, Wyler Ariel Tramway contributed \$734,649 in sales and \$415,973 in personal income to El Paso County in 2006. The Tramway also created 11.9 jobs and generated \$3,673 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. Hueco Tanks State Historic Site contributed \$582,207 in sales and \$331,774 in personal income to El Paso County in 2006. The park also created 9.4 jobs and generated \$2,911 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. The study did not include Franklin Mountains State Park. 12

### **Endnotes**

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Wyler Ariel Tramway contributed \$734,649 in sales and \$415,973 in personal income to El Paso County in 2006. Hueco Tanks State Historic Site contributed \$582,207 in sales and \$331,774 in personal income to El Paso County in 2006.

### Summary Economic Impacts Hueco Tanks State Historic Site and Wyler Aerial Tramway, El Paso County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$1,316,856	\$747,747	21.3	\$6,584

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$432,012	\$898,776	(\$466,764)

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

State Park Profiles -



### Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site Gillespie County



The LBJ park, near Stonewall in Central Texas, is actually a complex of three facilities: the state park on the south bank of the Pedernales River, the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm that abuts it and, across the river, a national historic park containing the reconstructed birthplace, schoolhouse and family cemetery of the nation's 36th president.

The visitor's center at the park is a joint effort by the state and federal park systems. Guided tours via bus leave the center hourly, bound for the national park, and are the only legal access visitors have to that park. None of the three facilities offers camping facilities, but the state park has a swimming pool popular with local residents, a dining hall and a group picnic area.

The Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm operates as it did in 1918. Volunteer farmers in period clothing using period tools run the farm. One of the two homes on the site is a log cabin used by the Sauer family when they settled the area in 1869. By 1900, the Beckmann family owned the farm. As the family's fortunes increased with good cotton crops, the Beckmanns built another, more modern Victorian house next door. But the term "modern" is relative — the "new" house has a porch, a tin roof and is covered in painted pressed tin common in that time. Barns, gardens, a blacksmithing area and a smokehouse complete the farm. <sup>1</sup>

- State Park Profiles -

Terry Young, assistant park manager, works closely with the Stonewall Chamber of Commerce and sits on their board. The annual "Peach Jamboree" in June is Stonewall's big celebration, and park attendance is notably higher during that weekend.<sup>2</sup>

Thirteen miles to the west of Stonewall is the Gillespie County seat, Fredericksburg. Although there are no state parks in the city itself, the LBJ state park and the popular Enchanted Rock state park are nearby. They are so close, in fact, that Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce President Mike Weberpal and Gillespie County Economic Development Commission Executive Director Greg Snelgrove mention them in one breath.

Weberpal says, "Our website gets 720,000 hits per year; about 125,000 of those are attributable to tourism activities in Gillespie County. The fourth most-searched term is 'outdoor' and the tenth most-searched term is 'parks.' From that, we estimate that the parks and other county tourism activities account for 15 percent of our tourism income." The site's popularity convinced county government recently to approve additional Web site development.

Fredericksburg has long been a popular tourist attraction with its beautiful scenery, historic Main Street and numerous bed and breakfasts, guest lodges, vacation homes, wineries and brewpubs. Weberpal and Snelgrove estimate that more than half of the visitors are retirees, but many visitors are families or groups coming to enjoy a reunion and the vistas. They also consider the presence of the state parks and other local attractions to contribute significantly to the area's amenities.

"Companies are becoming more interested in quality of life and outdoor recreation for their employees," says Snelgrove, to which Weberpal quickly adds, "and parks are part of the total package."

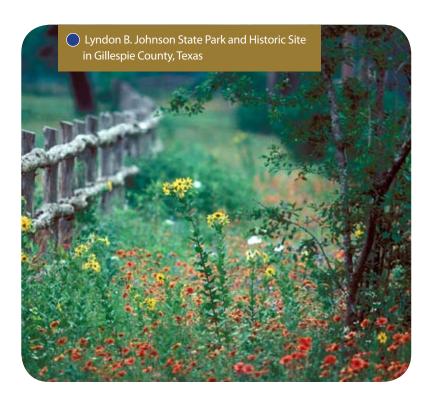
"We get 1.3 to 1.5 million visitors to Fredericksburg per year," says Weberpal. The city has 982 hotel rooms and 330 bed and breakfast sites. "Retail spending is about \$97 million, and we receive \$24.5 million in lodging receipts."

Due in part to the limited camping facilities but high number of day visitors, LBJ State Park does not often generate enough revenue to cover its expenses. In fiscal 2007, operating expenses — excluding costs for major capital repairs and employee benefits —were \$777,284 against revenues of \$202,263 for a net operating loss of \$575,021. Enchanted Rock, on the other hand, with extensive camping and recreational facilities, generated a net return of \$521,124 with \$388,139 in operating expenses and \$909,263 in revenues.<sup>4</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Lyndon B. Johnson State Historic Site contributed \$33,101,011 in sales and \$17,165,483 in personal income to Gillespie County in 2006. The park also created 719.7 jobs and generated \$165,505 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year.<sup>5</sup>



"Companies are becoming more interested in quality of life and outdoor recreation for their employees," says Snelgrove, to which Weberpal quickly adds, "and parks are part of the total package."



### - State Park Profiles -

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- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Mike Weberpal, president of Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce and Greg Snelgrove, executive director of Gillespie County

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# Summary Economic Impacts LBJ State Historic Site, Gillespie County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident	2006 County Employment	2006 County Sales Tax
	Income	(Full-Time Equivalent)	Generated
\$33,101,011	\$17,165,483	719.7	\$165,505

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$202,263	\$777,284	(\$575,021)

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## 3

Lyndon B. Johnson State Historic Site contributed \$33,101,011 in sales and \$17,165,483 in personal income to Gillespie County in 2006.

### TEXAS STATE PARKS

Natural Economic Assets

- State Park Profiles -



Lost Maples State Natural Area Bandera and Real Counties Garner State Park Uvalde County



Two of the best known and most popular state parks — Lost Maples in Bandera and Real counties and Garner in Uvalde County — share the rugged and scenic landscape of Texas that is laced with springs, creeks and rivers. Only 30 miles and a county line separate the two. Given the rural nature of the region, the parks benefit mutually from regional economic activity.

Lost Maples is famous for its trees that give the park its name. About 80,000 to 90,000 visitors each year marvel at the Uvalde bigtooth maples, which are descended from Ice Age survivors that

were "lost" among the steep limestone canyons and mossy, spring-fed creeks of the Sabinal River. Hikers can explore 11 miles of trails among the park's 2,174 acres and perhaps see endangered black-capped vireos or golden-cheeked warblers. The spring and fall migration seasons bring birds of every variety, making the park a marvelous destination for birdwatchers from the U.S., Europe and Asia. And what would fall be without vivid leaves of red and gold throughout the park's canyons?<sup>1</sup>

The 2,029-acre Garner State Park along the Frio River is the most popular camping destination in the state park system, with more than 300,000 visitors each year. Families proudly display flags at their campsites indicating that they have been coming to Garner for generations. More than 70 percent of visitors stay overnight, more than any other park in the state.<sup>2</sup> Garner also boasts cabins and a dance pavilion built by the Civilian



The 2,029-acre
Garner State Park
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than 300,000 visitors
each year.

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Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. Nightly dances, held since the CCC workers began inviting locals out to the park, draw visitors from the surrounding area.<sup>3</sup>

The economic vitality of Garner, and to a much lesser extent Lost Maples, contributes significantly to the economic activity of the region. Tom Austin, Uvalde's economic development director, says Uvalde was founded at the crossroads of the two longest highways in the country, U.S. 83 and U.S. 90. Because of that, Uvalde and the surrounding area depend on truck and car traffic and tourism.

"Tourism is a big deal to us," Austin says. "And it's probably a lot larger than we realize."

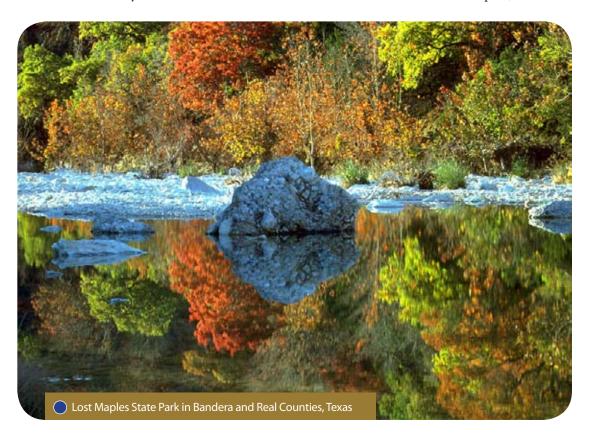
The Uvalde Convention and Visitors' Bureau (CVB) recently paid for a branding effort to more specifically define Uvalde's tourism potential. The study found people come to Uvalde because of the surrounding area, primarily Garner and area waterways.

"Uvalde has more spring-fed rivers and streams than any other county," Austin says. "If you remember the old Pearl Beer commercial about the water for their beer coming from the land of 1,100 springs, this is the area they were talking about." <sup>4</sup>

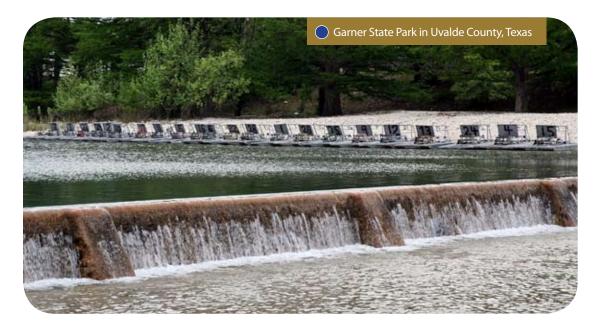
Ken Cave of the Texas Hill Country River Region (THCRR), the tourism organization for the area surrounding Uvalde, echoed Austin's statement. But, he says, access to those streams is limited to private parks, public road bridges and Garner State Park. The THCRR represents 80 bed and breakfast hotels, privately owned guest cabins and lodges — including Garner — that serve tourists in the Frio River area and provide water recreation. According to THCRR data, in 2007, these hotels generated more than \$8 million in estimated sales and almost \$500,000 in hotel motel and tax receipts that were used to fund THCRR's economic development activities. (Texas parks collect hotel motel taxes on overnight visitors staying in a cabin, but not for tent or RV campers.)5



The economic vitality of Garner, and to a much lesser extent Lost Maples, contributes significantly to the economic activity of the region.



- State Park Profiles -



Both parks experienced a change in visitation, according to Lost Maples Superintendent John Stuart and Garner Superintendent Rick Meyers, who say high gasoline prices are likely discouraging visitors from Dallas and Houston while encouraging visitors from San Antonio and the Texas-Mexico border. Park hosts — generally retired couples in RVs who work at the parks in exchange for free campsites — are coming either from areas closer to the parks or, if they hail from the Midwest and Canada, are staying longer.

"We might start missing snowbirds," Stuart says wryly, referring to the nickname for winter visitors to South Texas. One park host couple he knows figured the cost of gasoline just to get home to Ohio would be \$1,000.

This change in visitation is having one good side effect. As Meyers says, "All the visitors from San Antonio stop at the Uvalde Wal-Mart and load up" on camping gear, food, drinks, rafts and the like. Both the manager and co-manager of the Uvalde Wal-Mart, George Herrera and Frank Ramirez, call their store a "river store" because of all the river-related equipment and consumables they sell. Even their regional marketing managers have taken to the phrase.

Garner has the highest net revenue of all state parks. In 2007, Garner's operating costs, excluding the costs for major repairs, capital and employee benefits, were \$1,041,847; revenues were \$2,206,138 for a net gain of \$1,164,291.

Lost Maples also has positive net revenue. In 2007, the park generated revenues of \$421,606 against \$322,107 in expenses, for a \$99,499 net gain.<sup>8</sup>

A study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University found that Lost Maples State Park contributed \$1,665,659 in sales and \$691,417 in personal income to Bandera County in 2006. The park also created 51.6 jobs and generated \$8,328 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. (The study did not estimate the park's economic impact on Real County.) Garner State Park contributed \$7,803,922 in sales and \$3,337,366 in personal income to Uvalde County in 2006. The park also created 115.6 jobs and generated \$39,019 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year.<sup>9</sup>



Lost Maples State
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and \$3,337,366 in
personal income
to Uvalde County
in 2006.

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# Summary Economic Impacts Lost Maples State Park, Bandera County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$1,665,659	\$691,417	51.6	\$8,328

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$421,606	\$322,107	\$99,499

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

# Summary Economic Impacts Garner State Park, Uvalde County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$7,803,922	\$3,337,366	115.6	\$39,019

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$2,206,138	\$1,041,847	\$1,164,291

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

### TEXAS STATE PARKS

Natural Economic Assets

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### Mustang Island State Park Nueces County



Nestled between the cities of Corpus Christi and Port Aransas, Mustang Island State Park encompasses 4,000 acres and almost five miles of beach on the Gulf of Mexico. The land was acquired by the state during the early 1970s, but the park facilities were built and opened to the public in 1979. The island was named after the horses that were brought to the island by Spaniards, and was first called Wild Horse Island then Mustang Island after the mesteños (wild horses). The Karankawa Indians were the first known inhabitants of the island and lived there until the 19th century.

Mustang Island State Park is situated uniquely between Corpus Christi Bay and the Gulf of Mexico

and offers a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Visitors enjoy camping, swimming, fishing, picnicking, surfing, sunbathing, hiking, mountain biking and outstanding birding. Also popular: kayaking on the Mustang Island State Park Paddling Trail, which follows the western shoreline of the island in the Corpus Christi Bay.

Three paddling trails make up the Mustang Island State Park Paddling Trail. These are the North Trail (8.5 miles), the Ashum Trail (6.8 miles) and the Shamrock Loop Trail (5.24 miles). Collectively, all three trails offer more than 20 miles of natural habitat for observing various species of birds, armadillos and small mammals. Flounder, black drum, redfish and spotted sea trout offer numerous fishing opportunities to those on the trails.<sup>2</sup>

Facilities at the park include 48 guest sites with water and electricity hookups while offering



Mustang Island State Park encompasses 4,000 acres and almost five miles of beach on the Gulf of Mexico.

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capacity for an additional 300 primitive camping units. Four host sites are available to park host volunteers, who are often "Winter Texans."

Mustang Island State Park Superintendent Damon Reeves explains that because the park is situated on a coastal barrier island, careful consideration is given to managing large numbers of visitors while preserving the unique ecosystem. Park employees do not manipulate the vegetation and sand dunes in an effort to keep the landscape as natural as possible. Reeves pointed out that manmade improvements or manipulating the natural landscape of any ecosystem can have unintended, negative consequences.

The emphasis on keeping the park as natural as possible has also resulted in a new type of visitor. Eco-tourism, or nature-based tourism, is becoming more popular, and Mustang Island State Park has seen an increase in this type of visitor. The park interpreter and other staff now offer interpretive ecological tours on request.

Reeves has also noticed that the traditional visitor to the park has changed increasingly as well. Park employees have noticed that many of the visitors to the park are increasingly local, from Corpus

Christi or the Coastal Bend regions. They speculated that higher gas prices have forced some to look for vacation options that are closer to where they live.<sup>3</sup>

Bud Harris, interim president and chief executive officer of the Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce, feels that the park has a positive effect on his local population. He says the park and the city and state roads leading to it are high-traffic areas and provide access points for a beach destination. Harris says the park is providing a recreational service to city residents, even though the city has its own beaches. The City of Corpus Christi established a fire station right next to the park to provide fire protection services primarily to city residents, but it also can very easily be used to respond to emergencies at the park.

The city also provides police officers to patrol outlying areas of the park and helps maintain some of the roadways leading to park land. Harris says the park has a positive effect on property values and is an asset to the area. Reeves notes that convenience stores and other retail stores from the JFK Causeway to State Highway 361 are frequently busy with lines of patrons, which contribute to sales tax revenue to the city and the state. Reeves also points out that Mustang Island State Park has an intangible value in that the park provides the last natural section of the Texas barrier island with access to the beach that the general public can use.<sup>4</sup>

On the other side of the park, Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce executive director, Ann Vaughn, says the park has had a positive effect on the local economy as well as the aesthetic beauty of the area. Visitors who stay at the park will frequently travel to Port Aransas to shop for groceries, souvenirs and other necessities.

Vaughn points out that there is only a finite amount of land on the island and even less available beachfront property. The value of the park land is substantial, but the cost to society of losing the last



Eco-tourism, or nature-based tourism, is becoming more popular, and Mustang Island State Park has seen an increase in this type of visitor.

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visited August 22, 2008.)

**Endnotes** 

public park, beach and campsite on Mustang Island would be significant as well. However, Vaughn says the park's value could be enhanced.

"The park is a jewel in the rough because so much ties to the park," she says, adding that additional lodging facilities as well as other amenities could attract more people to visit the park.<sup>5</sup>

Mustang Island State Park developed a master plan to help guide future improvements to the park, but at the time of this writing, no improvements had been scheduled.

Fiscal 2007 expenditures for operations, minor repairs and staff salaries at the park were \$490,445. Against revenues of \$470,847, the park reported a net loss of \$19,598.6

A study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University found that Mustang Island State Park contributed \$3,653,707 in sales and \$2,016,781 in personal income to Nueces County in 2006. The park also created 66.4 jobs and generated \$18,269 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year.<sup>7</sup>

### **Summary Economic Impacts** Mustang Island State Park, Nueces County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident	2006 County Employment	2006 County Sales Tax
	Income	(Full-Time Equivalent)	Generated
\$3,653,707	\$2,016,781	66.4	\$18,269

Source: Texas A&M University.

more could be done to invest in additional ameni-

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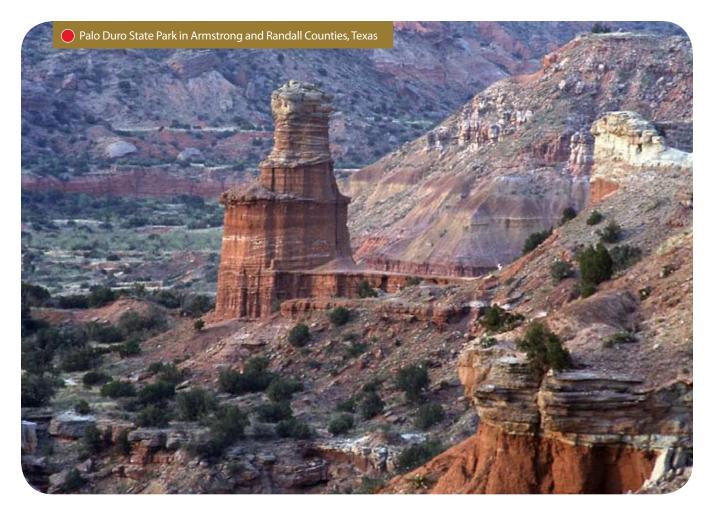
Mustang Island State Park contributed \$3,653,707 in sales and \$2,016,781 in personal income to Nueces County in 2006.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$470,847	\$490,445	(\$19,598)

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

State Park Profiles -





Palo Duro Canyon State Park now spans more than 26,000 acres, making it the second-largest state park in Texas. It is also one of the most frequently visited, with 301,931 visitors in fiscal 2007, including 47,626 overnight visitors.

### Palo Duro Canyon State Park Armstrong and Randall Counties



One of the crown jewels of the state park system, Palo Duro Canyon State Park is located in the Texas Panhandle about 25 miles south of Amarillo and 15 miles east of Canyon. The park encompasses a sizable portion of Palo Duro Canyon, the "Grand Canyon of Texas" and the nation's second-largest canyon.

The Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River formed Palo Duro Canyon over millions of years. The canyon extends for 60 miles through Randall, Armstrong and Briscoe counties, averaging six miles in width and reaching depths of up to 800 feet. Caprock Canyons State Park, some 80 miles to the southeast shares similar topography.

The impressive landscape of the Palo Duro is largely invisible as one drives east from Canyon. Only as one approaches the park entrance does the drama of the setting reveal itself. With two recent acquisitions on the park's southern edge made possible with the help of the Amarillo Foundation, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land, Palo Duro Canyon State Park now spans more than 28,000 acres, making it the second-largest state park in Texas. It is also one of the most frequently visited, with 301,931 visitors in fiscal 2007, including 47,626 overnight visitors.

- State Park Profiles -

Palo Duro Canyon State Park is one of relatively few Texas state parks that generate more revenue than expenses. In fiscal 2007, the park generated \$1,000,131 in revenue against \$628,017 in operating costs for a surplus of \$372,114. This was the 4th largest surplus of any state park in Texas in that year.<sup>4</sup>

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) developed the park during the 1930s. Visitors enjoy a panoramic view of the canyon from the historic visitor center and can spend the night in one of three recently refurbished cabins constructed by the CCC. The park boasts dozens of miles of trails for hiking and mountain biking, including one of the signature hikes in Texas, the six-mile Lighthouse Trail. Horseback riding is popular, with guided equestrian tours provided by Old West Stables, one of several independent concessionaires operating in the park.

Palo Duro offers a full range of camping options, from cabins and RV sites to primitive campsites and remote backpacking. Park visitors can enjoy birding and other nature watching. A road constructed by the CCC provides a scenic drive along the canyon floor.<sup>5</sup>

Almost as impressive as its scenery is the fact that Palo Duro Canyon State Park is managed and operated by just 16 full-time equivalent employees. Given its large area and the heavy year-round flow of visitors, the Palo Duro staff's ability to keep the park in operation is remarkable. The park averages only two to three employees on duty at any given time. This arrangement can pose logistical challenges, since at least one employee must manage the front gate from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. When maintenance problems or law enforcement situations arise, an already challenging arrangement becomes even more difficult.

As with many other state parks visited by the Comptroller's review team, staff at Palo Duro Canyon said that they would be unable to keep the park functioning without volunteers. The park host program allows long-term volunteers to donate their time and services in exchange for an RV campsite in the park. The park is also supported by an extremely committed volunteer organization, the Partners in Palo Duro Canyon Foundation. The group hosts a Web site and publishes a quarterly newsletter, and its members staff the park gift shop.

"Volunteers keep us alive," says park superintendent Randy Ferris, who estimates that hundreds of people donate their time at Palo Duro each year. Ferris reports that in recent years, the park has received about as much funding from Partners in Palo Duro as it has from the state.

On Palo Duro Canyon's economic impact, Superintendent Ferris takes the long view: "As long as it's been here, the canyon has supported people." The prehistoric Clovis and Folsom people hunted bison and mammoth in the canyon more than 10,000 years ago. The Kiowa and Comanche lived in the region and used the canyon as a base for their raids on encroaching settlers. Following the defeat of the Comanche in the years after the Civil War, much of the canyon was part of the J. A. Ranch operated by legendary Texas cattleman Charles Goodnight.

In the 1930s, local community boosters including the Canyon and Amarillo chambers of commerce were instrumental in the establishment of a park at the canyon. These boosters helped persuade President Roosevelt to designate Palo Duro as a CCC site and send crews to develop the park. These community leaders recognized the historical, cultural and ecological importance of the canyon — as well as the economic opportunities the park would provide.

Today, Palo Duro remains important to the Panhandle economy. According to Jerry Holt of the Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council, regular surveys of tourists to the region consistently



In fiscal 2007, the park generated \$1,000,131 in revenue against \$628,017 in operating costs for a surplus of \$372,114.

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Holt calls Palo Duro
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rank Palo Duro Canyon State Park highly in visitor satisfaction.

Holt calls Palo Duro Canyon one of the region's primary tourist attractions, and notes that his organization features it "very prominently in virtually all of the literature that the Convention and Visitors Council sends out." For example, a recent print advertisement for Amarillo-area tourism that ran in publications such as *Texas Monthly* and *Texas Highways* included a photo of the scenic canyon.

Many of the region's visitors come from other states. According to Holt, most out-of-state inquiries about the Amarillo region come from Missouri, Kansas and Colorado. Given that expenditures and tax revenues generated from out-of-state

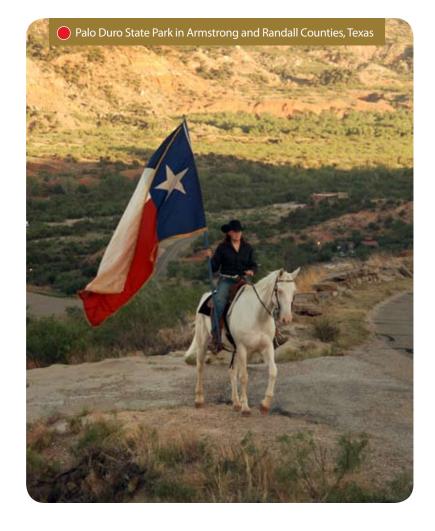
visitors represent new money for the state, the park's ability to attract such visitors is very important. Ferris estimates that in an average year about half of all overnight campers in Palo Duro Canyon are from out of state. He also notes, however, that thus far in 2008 out-of-state visits have fallen to about 25 percent of the total, undoubtedly due to high gas prices that have prompted many to vacation closer to home. Many state parks visited by Comptroller researchers reported similar patterns.

Even so, Palo Duro has experienced a net increase in visits during 2008.

In addition to its impressive natural amenities, thousands of visitors are drawn to the park each summer to enjoy the nightly performance of the musical drama *Texas!*, the state's official play. *Texas!* spotlights the history of the Panhandle region and is performed on Tuesday through Saturday nights from June through August at the park's outdoor amphitheater. The Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Canyon, produces the play. The foundation shares a portion of the production's proceeds with the park, and both entities benefit from crosspromotion. Play attendees also can opt to enjoy a dinner prepared by the Big Texan Steak Ranch before the show.

Bill Anderson, executive director of the Texas Panhandle Heritage Foundation, emphasizes that *Texas!* is a major economic driver for the city of Canyon. During the months that the play is in production, Anderson's organization employs about 120 actors, stagehands, theater professionals and other individuals for the production. <sup>10</sup> According to a 2002 analysis produced by West Texas A&M University in Canyon, *Texas!* contributes more than \$34 million to the regional economy through direct and indirect production and visitor expenditures. <sup>11</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M



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### Natural Economic Assets

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University, Palo Duro State Park contributed \$9,397,441 in sales and \$4,796,420 in personal income to Randall County in 2006. The park also created 224.4 jobs and generated \$18,795 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. 12

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\$9,397,441 in sales
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personal income
to Randall County
in 2006.

# Summary Economic Impacts Palo Duro State Park, Armstrong and Randall Counties

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident	2006 County Employment	2006 County Sales Tax
	Income	(Full-Time Equivalent)	Generated
\$9,397,441	\$4,796,420	224.4	\$18,795

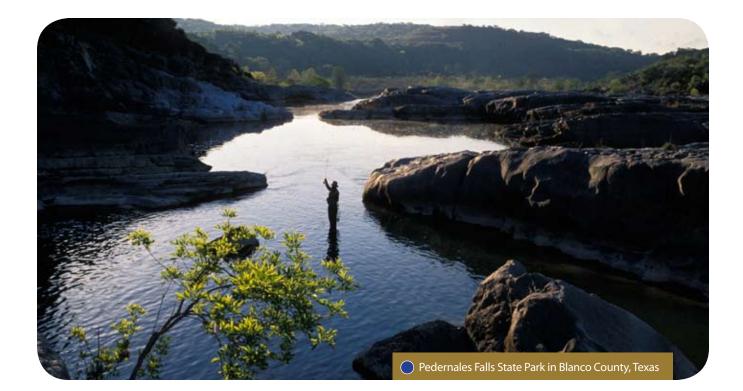
Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$1,000,131	\$628,017	\$372,114

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

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### Pedernales Falls State Park Blanco County



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Pedernales Falls State Park hosts an average of 100,000 to 200,000 visitors each year. Wilderness is the star attraction at Pedernales Falls State Park. A river with rocky limestone falls, hiking trails, remote campsites with RV hook-ups for the comfort-minded and bird watching opportunities are among the assets of the park.

Just 40 miles from Austin and 68 miles from San Antonio, Pedernales Falls State Park hosts an average of 100,000 to 200,000 visitors each year. June is generally the busiest month, according to Park Superintendent Bill McDaniel. The park's natural beauty and proximity to tourist destinations like Lyndon B. Johnson National and State Historic Sites in Johnson City; Fredericksburg, a popular tourist attraction; Blanco and Guadalupe River State Parks; and Enchanted Rock State Natural Area make this Hill Country retreat a popular stop for nature lovers. <sup>2</sup>

In 1970, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department purchased 5,211 acres from the Circle Bar Ranch in Blanco Country. In its naturally wild state, the park's visitors could hike to see the eightmile stretch of the Pedernales River, which turns into a raging torrent when sufficient rain falls nearby or upstream.<sup>3</sup> Today, the park is sparsely developed, but has a park headquarters building with a store, water treatment facility, bird viewing station and restrooms with and without showers. A 69-site camping area with electricity, water and RV hook-ups, a primitive camping area with room for 20 groups and a youth group camping area add facilities for overnight stays. Trails include 19.8 miles for hiking and mountain biking; 10 miles for horseback riding; and 14 miles for backpacking.4

Financially, the park collects more revenue than it spends, and thus provides surplus revenue to the park system. A staff of 11 is aided by "park hosts" — volunteers who stay in the park for free in exchange for aiding park visitors and helping with basic maintenance. The volunteer program

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has been important in helping to keep the parks operating during times of restricted funding. Volunteers stay for a minimum of one month and have access to a laundromat and email. Volunteers often travel to nearby Johnson City and other communities to buy groceries, supplies and meals.

One new staff position plus some funding for seasonal and hourly staffing, will be added as a new allocation of funding becomes available. A water treatment project will also be funded.<sup>5</sup>

Outdoor activities and the chance for peace and quiet bring visitors to the park. Steve Matthews, real estate broker and owner of RE/MAX Home Ranch Realty in Johnson City, says he moved there in 1977 because of the parks — Pedernales and the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Site. He said he and his family would drive from San Antonio with a travel trailer and stay at Pedernales.

"We fell in love with the place," he says.

Retirement brought the opportunity to permanently relocate, and he purchased a house in the area. Today, "there's a tremendous number of people who come to the area because of the parks," he confirmed.<sup>6</sup>

Sandra Treviño, owner of the Hill Country Cupboard on U.S. Highway 281 in Johnson City, says that most of her customers are tourists.

"Families are the majority of our business," she reported, "But high gas prices have affected our sales this year. People tell us they don't get out in the area as much."

Her business is near the busy crossroads of U.S. Highway 281 and Highway 290, so she sees people coming from San Antonio, Austin and Marble Falls. She says she can pick out the campers immediately by the clothes they're wearing.

"Today we had a lot of campers," she related, as Hurricane Dolly brought rain and cloudy skies to the Hill Country.<sup>7</sup>

Campers may want to bring their binoculars to view birds. Over 150 bird species have been spotted at Pedernales Falls State Park, and the endangered golden-cheeked warbler comes to nest in cedars in mid-March.<sup>8</sup> A volunteer built a bird blind after Park Superintendent McDaniel saw a sanctuary in Florida.<sup>9</sup> The glass-fronted blind holds bird identification materials, a list of birds spotted and room for about 15 people to gather. Water and food help attract the birds. Sometimes other wildlife partakes of the bounty. Typical Hill Country wildlife — deer, coyotes and armadillos — also live in the wooded areas of the park and may be seen near the blind.<sup>10</sup>

Bird and wildlife watching can help the local and state economies. Wildlife watchers in Texas spent an average of \$686 in 2006, according to a survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. On each day of a trip, they spent an average of \$32, averaging about 14 days away from home. In total, trip-related spending in Texas totaled \$424.2 million. Another \$2.5 billion was spent on equipment and other supplies.<sup>11</sup>

Fishing, swimming and mountain biking are allowed, but you need to bring your own horse if riding on a trail is your preferred activity. <sup>12</sup> Occasionally, public hunts for deer or feral hogs are allowed, but none have been held in the last few years. If the park is opened for a public hunt, all guests must leave and the park is closed to nonhunters for the duration of the hunt.

The possibility of development threatens the pristine, isolated nature of the park. Nearby property is for sale that McDaniel says would be a very valuable addition to the park, but TPWD does not have the funds to purchase it. If housing or other development occurs, visitors may see houses across the river instead of wilderness. They may also be



Over 150 bird species have been spotted at Pedernales Falls State Park.

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tempted to cross the Pedernales River where access has been forbidden, owing to past incidents of drowning or injuries. Park Superintendent McDaniel says the water treatment plant is another issue. He and several employees are trained to monitor and treat the water, but keeping it in compliance with state regulations is tricky.<sup>13</sup>

In fiscal 2007, Pedernales Falls State Park reported a healthy net gain of \$84,587 on revenues of \$642,949 and operating expenses (including staff salaries and minor repairs) of \$558,362.<sup>14</sup>

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Pedernales Falls State Park contributed \$1,607,313 million in sales and \$625,923 million in personal income to Blanco County in 2006. The park also created 46 jobs and generated \$8,037 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. <sup>15</sup>

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### Summary Economic Impacts Pedernales Falls State Park, Blanco County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$1,607,313	\$625,923	46	\$8,037

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$642,949	\$558,362	\$84,587

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## **€**

Park contributed

Pedernales Falls State

\$1,607,313 million in sales and \$625,923 million in personal income to Blanco County in 2006.

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Tyler State Park Smith County and Caddo Lake State Park Harrison County



Nestled among the piney woods of East Texas are two popular parks, one catering to swimmers and campers and the other to naturalists and fishermen. Tyler State Park, located just north of Tyler, is a scenic 985.5-acre park with a 64-acre, spring-fed lake perfect for swimming, camping and nearby picnics.<sup>1</sup>

About 75 miles east of Tyler State Park, near Lady Bird Johnson's hometown of Karnack and only three miles west of the Louisiana border, is Caddo Lake State Park, bordering the largest naturally formed lake in Texas. In contrast to Tyler's all-American family atmosphere, Caddo Lake is almost mystical, with its 26,810 acres of shallow waters supporting a forest of cypress trees draped in long strands of Spanish moss that come alive with the slightest breeze. One gets the feeling that if the lake could talk, it would have many ancient stories to tell.<sup>2</sup>

Both parks are intimately connected to the citizens that live in the surrounding area.

"Tyler State Park is the backyard for a lot of people in the Lindale, Mineola, and Tyler area," says Park Superintendent Bill Smart. "They can come right out here and enjoy a short vacation for the weekend." The park often hosts family picnics and recreational events for doctors and medical staff from the area's many health facilities — the East Texas Medical Center, the University of Texas Health Center at Tyler, and Trinity Mother Frances System Hospitals and Clinics.

Smart says the park is the top tourist attraction in Smith County, a claim echoed by Tom Mullins, president and chief executive officer of the Tyler Area Chamber of Commerce.<sup>4</sup>

Because of the park's 14 miles of outstanding trails, Tyler is popular with mountain bikers and trail walkers of all types. Several years ago, Trinity Mother Frances Hospitals offered a cardio fitness program at the park, recalls John Moore, public information officer for the hospitals. The East Texas Trekkers, a non-competitive walking club organized to

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"stimulate personal fitness, health and relaxation," frequently hosts organized walks at the park.<sup>6</sup>

Caddo, consisting of 484 acres, boasts nine CCC-built cabins, now renovated to include bathrooms and kitchens, and a group recreation or dining hall. The park's lake and public boat dock are popular with fishermen, swimmers, scuba divers, kayakers and paddle boat enthusiasts. One of the more interesting groups of regular visitors is the Dogwood Chapter of the Lone Star Dutch Oven Society, which meets regularly to cook breads, casseroles, meats and desserts in the cast-iron covered pots over hot coals. The DOGs, as they refer to themselves, teach other visitors how to cook in the pots, the style of which is credited to American Revolutionary War hero Paul Revere.<sup>7</sup>

In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) did much of the stonework at the park, along with constructing the boathouse, but did not build cabins like it had at other parks. However, the park has many screened shelters, group picnic areas and campsites with and without water and electricity.<sup>8</sup>

While only 75 miles away, Caddo Lake State Park could be in another world. The immense, broad

and shallow lake shared by Texas and Louisiana is hushed, the only sounds being the breathy, light winds through the bald cypress trees and the occasional splash of a fish or call of a bird. The lake or, more accurately, the swamp has filled and drained many times. These fluctuations were due either to a natural dam of trees and other debris that formed at a choke point in Louisiana or from government intervention in the late 1800s to drain it. Peaceful tribes of Caddo Indians and less peaceful pirates, smugglers, brigands and other assorted lawbreakers inhabited the many secret places along the lakeshores for centuries before oil and cotton came to the area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Caddo, consisting of 484 acres, boasts nine CCC-built cabins, now renovated to include bathrooms and kitchens, and a group recreation or dining hall. About 60 campsites accommodate campers in tents and recreational vehicles. The park has one of only two public boat ramps on the huge lake, which alone makes it a popular destination for local visitors. Besides fishing and canoeing, visitors enjoy bird watching, other wildlife viewing and photography, and miles of equestrian trails.<sup>9</sup>

Todd Dickinson, park superintendent, Charlie Hubbard, the park's interpreter and guide, and Jay Webb, proprietor of the Caddo Lake Cabins down the road from the park in Uncertain and the former chamber of commerce president, all say that park visitors are the economic mainstay for the largely rural area. The growing majority of visitors to the area are coming from Dallas and Shreveport, La., but Webb estimates that 70 percent of those visitors own weekend homes along the lake's shores. Dickinson estimates that of the 60,000 to 75,000 paying customers to the park each year, perhaps 50,000 stay overnight. Many of these come to fish, says Dickinson, and he is quick to remind them and other visitors that no fishing license is required to fish in state parks. Caddo Lake State Park provides the only outdoor camping near the lake. Webb says this somewhat ruefully because his bed and breakfast can't offer



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camping, and he gets two to three calls a week inquiring about it. He says visitors who come with their kids want to return as campers. And it's not just the nature experience that draws them, but also the low crime rates around the lake that make security a valued amenity.<sup>10</sup>

The Caddo Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism's website lists 55 businesses — from fishing guides to cabins, boat dock construction companies, restaurants and realtors — that cater to park visitors. <sup>11</sup> Even though a large privately owned lodge and restaurant near the park has seen some hard times and is currently up for sale, other local bed and breakfasts are doing well, Webb says. Spring and fall are the busiest seasons, and Dickinson says the park is booked every weekend from midsummer to Thanksgiving. The only slow tourism months are December, January and February, Webb and Dickinson agree, but sometimes, warm weather in February brings out cabin fevered fishermen. <sup>12</sup>

Across the highway from Caddo State Park is a unique property — an 8,000-acre former munitions facility that is becoming a national wildlife management area. The Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant had produced military-grade TNT since World War II and solid-fuel rocket motors during the Cold War, and even had destroyed nuclear missiles under the terms of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty between the U.S. and the then-Soviet Union. But it's usefulness as a Defense Department plant came to an end in the 1990s. In 2000, the area became the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge. Although the refuge is still undergoing environmental remediation and facility construction, one day it will be a refuge for "one of the highest quality old-growth bottomland hardwood forests in the southeastern United States," according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, protecting some 224 species of birds, 22 species of amphibians, 46 species of reptiles and 93 species of fish.<sup>13</sup>

In 1993, the wetlands of Caddo Lake were listed as one of just 17 U.S. "Wetlands of International

Significance" under an international treaty called the Ramsar Convention of 1971. The Convention, managed by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat in Switzerland, lists 1,757 sites throughout the world comprising over 398 million acres of valuable and ecologically significant wetlands under conservation.<sup>14</sup>

Dickinson is hopeful that, one day, the two parks will be able to work cooperatively to attract visitors with more cabins, expanded camp sites, equestrian trails and stables, public boat docks and programs that will instill a reverence for nature with many generations to come.<sup>15</sup>

Financially, both Tyler and Caddo Lake state parks have ended recent fiscal years with mixed results. In fiscal 2007, Tyler's operating expenses (including minor repairs and salaries but not capital expenses or employee fringe benefits) were \$734,743 against \$751,454 in revenue, for a net gain of \$16,711. Caddo had revenues of \$319,065 against operating expenses of \$399,524 for a net loss of \$80,459 in 2007.

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Tyler State Park contributed \$1,804,911 in sales and \$1,047,672 in personal income to Smith County in 2006. The park also created 30.5 jobs and generated \$9,025 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. Caddo Lake State Park contributed \$1,793,831 in sales and \$961,334 in personal income to Harrison County in 2006. The park also created 37.4 jobs and generated \$8,969 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. <sup>17</sup>

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Tyler State Park contributed \$1,804,911 in sales and \$1,047,672 in personal income to Smith County in 2006.

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# Summary Economic Impacts Tyler State Park, Tyler County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$1,804,911	\$1,047,672	30.5	\$9,025

Source: Texas A&M University.

### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$751,454	\$734,743	\$16,711

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## Summary Economic Impacts Caddo Lake State Park, Harrison County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
\$1,793,831	\$961,334	37.4	\$8,969

Source: Texas A&M University.

#### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income	
\$319,065	\$399,524	(\$80,459)	

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Caddo Lake State

Park contributed

and \$961,334 in

\$1,793,831 in sales

personal income to Harrison County in 2006.

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World Birding Centers
Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley and
Estero Llano Grande State Parks
Hidalgo County
Resaca de la Palma State Park
Cameron County

Texas has long been known as an excellent destination for bird watchers. Its location in major migratory pathways, and also in the middle of the country with overlapping bird ranges, resulted in Texas being the only state with its own *Peterson's Field Guide* for birds. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) promotes birding as part of the overall wildlife experience available in state parks and nature areas, but in recent years the attention to birds has intensified. In 2000, TPWD completed the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail to guide birders to hundreds of sites along the Texas Gulf Coast. By then, plans were already being put into motion to develop a

new concept of nature tourism destination, the World Birding Center (WBC) in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV).

Rather than a single location, the WBC is a network of nine interpretive sites scattered along the southernmost edge of the state. TPWD, working in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, local communities and various nature tourism experts, identified the locations along 120 miles stretching from Roma at the western end to South Padre Island at the coast. WBC comprises more than 10,000 acres of land and offers a variety of habitats, reflecting and in some cases restoring the original, exceptional biodiversity of the LRGV.<sup>3</sup>

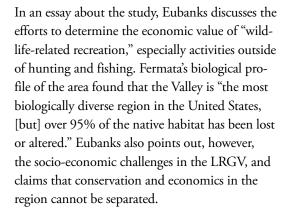
Ted Eubanks, a well-known birder and nature tourism expert, was involved with the creation of the WBC starting in the late 1990s. His company, Fermata Inc., conducted the original feasibility study for the project, titled *Using a World Class Birding Facility for Economic Conservation and Development in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley*.



Its location in major migratory pathways, and also in the middle of the country with overlapping bird ranges, resulted in Texas being the only state with its own *Peterson's Field Guide* for birds.

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"Nature tourism offers the LRGV an opportunity to both restore natural habitats and create critically needed jobs," he says, citing data showing the economic boost from visitors to previously established wildlife refuges in the Valley that attracted mainly dedicated birders. If "more casual recreationists, those interested in birds, butterflies, bats, historical sites, good food, and a nice bed-and-breakfast" (not to mention comfortable winters) could be lured to locations in the LRGV, the economic impact could be substantial. He extrapolates from existing data to project that each additional 10,000 visitors would provide:

- \$3.8 million in direct expenditures
- \$9.3 million in gross economic output

- 156 full-time jobs
- \$407,543 in state taxes
- \$287,133 in local taxes

The World Birding Center was conceived to be a large part of that "economic conservation" effort in far South Texas.<sup>4</sup>

Three Texas state parks are part of the WBC. The parks, all in different stages of development, contribute to the Valley's reputation as a nature destination where visitors come from around the world, some staying for months at a time, to enjoy the climate, culture and access to hundreds of species of winged creatures.<sup>5</sup>

#### Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park Hidalgo County

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park is well-known to serious bird watchers as a top site within this prime birding area. Located just a few miles south of Mission, the existing park became the designated headquarters for the WBC in 2004. As a result, visitors' vehicles are no longer allowed within the park. Access is now by bicycle, foot or the park-operated tram. Although RV camping in the park was discontinued, there is a new, private RV camping facility just across the



Three Texas state parks are part of the World Birding Center.

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road and there are still primitive campsites that can be reserved within the park.

The park features a new headquarters complex that has exhibits, meeting rooms, staff offices and a cafe and store. Future plans are to convert the small, older headquarters into a nature center. Within the 764-acre park the facilities are geared toward birding, with a hawk tower, viewing platforms and bird blinds. The staff includes naturalists and interpretive guides who are knowledgeable about locations good for spotting some of the signature birds and skilled at identifying and pointing out birds to novice birders. As with all parts of the WBC, there is a great emphasis on interpretive programs at Bentsen State Park.

Because park visitors no longer drive past an entry booth, Bentsen is more difficult than most parks for obtaining solid visitor numbers. According to TPWD, there were 52,337 visits in fiscal 2007; understandably, almost all of them were day visits. The area in general and the WBC in particular brings large numbers of what are termed "winter Texans," people coming from other parts of the country with, perhaps, harsher winters and lacking the fall and spring migration seasons that make Texas famous among bird watching enthusiasts. Even in the summertime, this area has birds that are found nowhere else in the U.S.

The same is true of other flying creatures that have their own enthusiasts, namely butterflies and odonates, or dragonflies and damselflies. Butterflies, in particular, have a growing following among Valley visitors. Mission hosts the Texas Butterfly Festival on the third weekend of October, and the North American Butterfly Association has an International Butterfly Park that is adjacent to the state park. Just as with the birds, there are hundreds of butterfly species to be seen in the LRGV, including some that are only seen there or outside the United States.

The Mission Chamber of Commerce understands the impact that Bentsen State Park, and other nature-tourist destinations in the Valley, have on the community. For six months out of the year, 70 RV parks in the region are home to thousands of winter Texans who shop, eat and entertain themselves in Mission, McAllen, Weslaco and other towns nearby. According to Arlene Rivera, president and CEO of the Mission Chamber, 85 percent of the RV slots there are already reserved for the winter, although the pace of the reservations has been somewhat slower this year, probably due to high gas prices. "The Chamber typically has about 80 people a day asking about the park," Rivera says. She conjectures that perhaps many winter Texans may not bring their RVs with them this time, which would raise the challenge of finding a place to rent.8

#### Estero Llano Grande State Park Hidalgo County

Less than 30 miles east of Mission is the city of Weslaco, home of the second of the WBC state parks, Estero Llano Grande. This 200-acre birding site opened in June 2006 and is located adjacent to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife refuge of an additional 46 acres, as well as a private 40 acre camp. Estero, which is Spanish for marsh, has several wetland areas, some restored from agricultural fields, and is the largest wetlands environment in the WBC network. It also boasts open scrub, woodlands and butterfly gardens. There are boardwalks, trails, an open-air pavilion and observation decks among the numerous water features, including a lake that is home to a family of alligators. The headquarters has a store, a large classroom/meeting room, and staff offices.

Perhaps even more than Bentsen, Estero has a strong interpretive and educational focus. Its six full-time and five part-time staff include several naturalists. There are multiple programs with weekly schedules, family-oriented events such as campouts and Junior Ranger Club and special



For six months out of the year, 70 RV parks in the region are home to thousands of winter Texans who shop, eat and entertain themselves in Mission, McAllen, Weslaco and other towns nearby.

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Tourism has been an important part of the region's economy for many decades, and eco-tourism is a rapidly growing segment of that industry.

occasions such as the Spooky Science Fest. The visitor count for the first full year of tracking (fiscal 2007) for this new park is low at slightly more than 7,300, according to the park superintendent. But the word is getting around about this excellent birding and wildlife-viewing location. From September 2007 through April 2008, the visitor count was nearly 10,400.9

#### Resaca de la Palma State Park Cameron County

The last of the WBC state parks is a 1,200-acre site just outside the city of Brownsville, called Resaca de la Palma. Resacas are oxbow lakes or ponds, leftover pieces of the river that, in the past, were often created by spring floods. Since the Rio Grande has been dammed, the natural cycle of those floods has changed and all three of these parks use irrigation water to supplement limited rainfall and maintain their features. Resaca de la Palma is not yet officially open, although visitors can schedule a park visit. Staffing is complete, and in July the large resaca that curves through the whole park was filled with water. The park superintendent, Pablo de Yturbe, says that the "soft" opening of the park late this spring was

delayed while equipment was installed to control the water levels in order to better mimic the river's pre-dam patterns. The park's grand opening is set for December 6, 2008.

De Yturbe says that, in many ways, Resaca will serve as a "city park" for Brownsville, in addition to being a WBC destination. The park offers a critical opportunity for education and offering access to and establishing a connection with the natural world in the rapidly growing, increasingly urbanized Valley.10

The connection between natural areas and economic development is well understood here. Tourism has been an important part of the region's economy for many decades, and ecotourism is a rapidly growing segment of that industry. The Rio Grande Valley Partnership is a collaborative Chamber of Commerce that includes the four counties of the LRGV—Starr, Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron. One of its publications is a large Birding and Butterfly Map that lists dozens of locations and methods to partake of the region's environmental features. In addition, the Web site www.SouthTexasNature.com aids tourists in their quest for a glimpse of the special

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winged inhabitants of the Valley. According to Martha Noell, president and CEO of Weslaco's Chamber of Commerce, the marketing efforts for nature tourism in the LRGV extend all the way to Europe. She has articles from foreign periodicals touting the Valley. "I don't know what it says," she comments, speaking of an article written in Japanese, "but I know it's talking about this area."

The WBC continues to evolve as a world-class bird-watching destination. The collaboration between numerous private entities and various levels of public agencies meant bringing the concept to fruition. Marketing the result was an interesting challenge. Indeed, at the planning stage of the WBC and its headquarters, there was a bit of competition between the cities with state park locations to get the headquarters established at their park. One businessman who has become increasingly involved with Bentsen State Park over the years was involved in that competition. Mike Rhodes owned 2,500 acres of agricultural land around the park as investment property. But when the plans for the WBC were being made, Rhodes and his wife became interested in developing that land as a community with a close connection to nature in general and the park in particular. As

part of that vision, Rhodes donated 270 acres of his land to be added to the park, a contribution he says was valued at \$2.5 million.

During the campaign to bring WBC headquarters to Bentsen, Rhodes committed to building an RV campground on his property across the road from the park, despite the fact that new RV parks are expensive to build and not generally considered a very good investment. Now, though, he has a large development project, Bentsen Palm, adjacent to the park. In addition to the RV campground, this development will have 4,500 home sites making up 11 sub-communities, a charter school, community parks and all-native common area landscaping. He promotes the presence of the park in all the marketing of his development and continues to be closely involved with building the nature tourism industry in the area as a means to a successful business venture. "All the trails, bike paths, everything is connected to and related to the park," Rhodes says. "The park is the gel that ties the whole community together."12

The Bentsen center had expenses of \$860,735 in fiscal 2007, against revenues of \$141,352, for a net operating loss of \$719,383. Because of



The WBC continues to evolve as a world-class bird-watching destination.

#### Natural Economic Assets

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Resaca's relative newness, it reported only \$38,756 in expenses and no revenue that year. No data were available for Estero Llano. 13

According to a study conducted by John Crompton and Juddson Culpepper of Texas A&M University, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park contributed \$2,854,704 in sales and \$1,259,157 in personal income to Hidalgo County in 2006. The park also created 78.7 jobs and generated \$14,274 in sales tax revenue for the county in that year. Estero Llano Grande State Park and Resaca de la Palma State Park were not included in the study.<sup>14</sup>



Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park contributed \$2,854,704 in sales and \$1,259,157 in personal income to Hidalgo County in 2006.

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#### Summary Economic Impacts, Bentsen Rio Grande Valley State Park, Hidalgo County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident	2006 County Employment	2006 County Sales Tax
	Income	(Full-Time Equivalent)	Generated
\$2,854,704	\$1,259,157	78.7	\$14,274

Source: Texas A&M University.

#### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$141,352	\$860,735	(\$719,383)

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

#### Summary Economic Impacts Resaca de la Palma State Park, Cameron County

2006 County Sales	2006 County Resident Income	2006 County Employment (Full-Time Equivalent)	2006 County Sales Tax Generated
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: Texas A&M University.

#### Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Direct Spending (Fiscal 2007)

Revenues	Operating Expenses*	Net Income
\$0	\$38,756	(\$38,756)

<sup>\*</sup> Includes salaries, operating expenses and minor (non-capital) repair. Source: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

#### Natural Economic Assets

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#### Natural Economic Assets

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